THE VICISSITUDES OF NARCISSISM IN BROWNING'S DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES

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A psychoanalytic model for interpreting Robert Browning's monologuists and monologue forms conceives the reader's position in relation to monologue speakers as analogous to that of the psychoanalyst in relation to patients, with the reader assuming a dual stance of empathy with and theoretical assessment of the speakers' character structures and psychodynamics. On the basis of an inductively developed composite psychological profile of a prototypical Browning monologuist, theoretical tools best fitting the phenomena are chosen for integration into the model.

Theories of narcissism developed by Karen Horney, Heinz Kohut, and others prove highly compatible with these recurring phenomena. The monologuists' sense of themselves as performers and others as audiences whose approval is necessary to confirm their value and existence reflects the narcissist's conditional mode of being associated with early alienation from the real self and identification with an

idealized self which, originally conferred by others, remains dependent upon others' confirmation. The monologuists' propensities for seeking states of merger with others, for extending themselves into their possessions and productions, for harboring grandiose self-conceptions and fantasies, and for asserting claims of entitlement may all be understood as manifesting their preservation of very early, narcissistic ways of experiencing the self and others. Their extreme reactions of rage and vengefulness when these trends are frustrated may likewise be seen as narcissistic phenomena.

Besides illuminating and integrating characteristics of Browning's speakers, analysis in terms of theories of narcissism shows that typically narcissistic psychodynamics governing the monologuists' moment-by-moment interactions with their auditors define the genre as Browning practices it. The precipitating event in a Browning monologue is very often a current or past injury to the speaker's narcissism; the speaker is attempting to restore or reconstruct the idealized self, using the auditor as a self-object. Selection and ordering of content, shifts in rhetorical stance, and other structuring features of the text arise from a common psychic substructure: the speaker's narcissistic defense system. The proposed model for reading the Browning monologue as narcissistic genre is tested in detailed readings of "Pictor Ignotus" and "Giuseppe Caponsacchi."

CHAPTER 1
BROWNING'S POETICS OF CHARACTER

If a significant number of Robert Browning's critics agreed with him, almost from the beginning, about anything, it is that--in his poetry generally and in his dramatic monologues particularly--he is preeminently a psychological poet. His earliest published statement of his poetic agenda, the preface to Paracelsus (1835), emphasizes his search for a form that would allow him to accomplish his "aim" of "setting forth any phenomenon of the mind or the passions" not by "having recourse to an external machinery of incidents to create and evolve the crisis [he] desires to produce," but by "ventur[ing] to display somewhat minutely the mood itself in its rise and progress" while leaving "the agency by which [the mood] is influenced and determined . . . generally discernible in its effects alone . . ." (1: 65). Browning's project in Paracelsus, then, was to discover a way to focus upon psychological reality conceived of as an "evolv[ing] crisis," a drama of psychodynamic processes as externalized in speech.

In his preface to Strafford (1837), Browning refers to the continuing influence of this central psychological purpose: to present "Action in Character rather than Character in Action" (2: 9). In 1863, having developed his characteristic version of the dramatic monologue as a poetic configuration reflecting the organization inherent in his

psychodynamic material, Browning reaffirmed his primary commitment to the truths of our psychic life in a dedication he added to Sordello (1840): "The historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires; and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul: little else is worth study. I, at least, always thought so . . ." (2: 123).

Browning's success at carrying out this commitment to a primarily psychological poetic was recognized by a number of his contemporaries. H. B. Forman's 1869 review of The Ring and the Book hailed that poem as "the Epic of Psychology" and its author as "the great leader of" what the reviewer terms "the Psychological School of poetry" (337, 335). The anonymous author of the 1890 Atlantic Monthly article "Browning not Among the Supreme Poets" faulted Browning's "defective art" but praised him "as the most powerful realist in the representation of human life who has appeared in England since Shakespeare" (519). Later that year Oscar Wilde emphasized the same aspect of Browning's achievement, writing that "considered from the point of view of a creator of character he ranks next to him who made Hamlet. Had he been articulate he might have sat beside him" (526).

More thoughtful nineteenth-century commentators saw a connection between Browning's primary allegiance to psychological realism, especially in his dramatic monologues, and his supposedly inartistic methods. George Eliot, in her review of "the dramatic-psychological" poetry of Men and Women, contended that Browning's method for the "dramatic painting" of "all the secrets of human character" is dependent upon "dramatic indication, which requires the reader to trace

by his own mental activity the underground stream of thought that jets out in elliptical and pithy verse" (174). Eliot thus implies, quite correctly I think, that in Browning's dramatic monologues, with their peculiar convolutions, reversals, and discontinuities (their "elliptical" qualities), language and structure have been put in the service of following "the underground stream of thought"--the vagaries of psychodynamic process--upon which the poems center. Another of the poet's contemporaries summed up this central emphasis in the statement that Browning's aesthetic, didactic, and philosophic interests are at most "secondary" to his major "aim": "to create. . . . live men and women" (rev. of Ferishtah's Fancies 491-92).

Though Browning fostered this view of his art as essentially psychological and was intelligently seconded by a number of his contemporaries, many twentieth-century critics, especially in recent decades, have acknowledged his brilliantly insightful representations of character, but have maintained the focus on his ideas--his "philosophy," his moral "teachings"--that distinguished a second, non-psychological strand in nineteenth-century Browning criticism, the strand more frequently associated both with the Browning Society enthusiasts and with a general trend toward adulation of Browning and his poetry. This thematic approach, increasingly sophisticated and increasingly detached (on the surface, at least) from its original adulatory impulse, may include criticism that discusses his characters at length, but does so in order to assimilate the poet's psychological materials into systems or issues that are essentially non-psychological.

Thus the psychological analysis of the monologuists in such a book as W. David Shaw's The Dialectical Temper serves his examination of what he sees as Browning's essentially didactic method: his "rhetorical art of engaging an audience and controlling its responses" in order "to modify his readers' aesthetic, moral, and religious attitudes" (1). The monologuists are analyzed in order to classify their rhetoric according to a thematic scheme: Kierkegaard's "aesthetic," "ethical," and "religious" stages of development (62). In Constance W. Hassett's The Elusive Self in the Poetry of Robert Browning, psychological analysis of the monologuists is aimed toward developing an account of Browning's belief that confession, conceived of as a "process of autobiography" that leads to "self-confrontation," may "supply the impetus for spiritual change" and "moral transformation," that is, "conversion" (3). Similarly, J. Hillis Miller's influential phenomenological reading of Browning's works is channeled into an essentially thematic treatment of Victorian writers' sense that God had disappeared.

The difficulties inherent in such thematic treatments of Browning's characters are exemplified in David Bergman's attempt to redefine thematically the poet's phrase "development of a soul" (Sordello 2: 123). "Soul" here is ordinarily taken to refer to "the whole inner life of a character, his [Browning's] interest being psychological rather than moral or philosophical" (King, "Browning: 'Mage'" 189; cf. Ryals 148; Raymond 5, 17). Bergman attempts to overturn this assumption that the dramatic monologue "imitat[es]" the soul's development as "a definite and autonomous personality" and to

argue that Browning's concerns are primarily "theological" (772, 774). According to him, the poet means by "development" a progressive "detach[ment]" of the soul "from the material world" (775), a process that involves moving from a lower spiritual state, where "highly individual character" with all its "failure and corruption" is found (772-73), to a state of "higher consciousness" (779). Browning's interest in "personality" (774) is not central to his work, but rather incidental to his presentation of "the early stages of [his] scheme of spiritual development" (778).

Several problems weaken Bergman's argument. Its association of higher spiritual development with an abstract style (779) overlooks the abstract style of such notorious casuists as Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau and Don Juan of Fifine at the Fair and assumes that "historical detail" and "a concrete setting" are essential to the creation of "a highly individual character" (772). Bergman often makes questionable use of evidence drawn from the context of the phrase "development of a soul": he paraphrases Browning's "external machinery of incidents" (preface to Paracelsus 1: 65) as "'external machinery' of setting" (775) and Browning's "mood" (preface to Paracelsus 1: 65) as "movement of spirit" (775); and referring to Browning's use of the phrase "imaginary persons" in his note (3: 197) on the Dramatic Lyrics section of the collected works (the section includes, among others, "My Last Duchess," "The Laboratory," and "Count Gismond"), Bergman minimizes the psychological content of this formulation by placing it in relation only to what happens to be the

first poem in the section, "Cavalier Tunes," where, as Bergman says, "the speaker--or speakers--are only sketchily drawn" (774).

The amount of such misreading required to turn "development of a soul" into a primarily religious and moral concept and thus to displace the psychological dimension from the center of Browning's work suggests that thematic approaches, in which psychological analysis is accorded at most a subordinate role, may not be congruent with the nature of Browning's monologues. As some twentieth-century critics have recognized, Browning accords a privileged position to the psychological dimension in his way of grasping, knowing, and presenting his poetic world. Following upon The Poetry of Experience, where Robert Langbaum unfolds his influential view of the dramatic monologue as a genre in which "the meaning is character" (181) and "the speaker . . . is the poem" (200), Park Honan, Roma A. King, Jr., and Richard D. Altick and James F. Loucks II offer extended formalist analyses that assume the centrality of the psychological dimension in Browning's monologues (see Honan 3-4; King, Bow and the Lyre 125-26, 128, 145; Altick and Loucks 3, 9-10). Morse Peckham, who has understood the poet's epistemology more clearly than anyone else has, argues that for Browning, "what unifies will, perception, cognition, and truth is personality, and . . . the problem of epistemology, that is, of knowledge and of what can be known, is inseparable from the problem of personality." For the poet "epistemology is a personality problem, not a philosophical question" ("Personality" 103; cf. Burrows 201; Flowers 74; Slinn 107).

The practical necessity for recognizing this privileging of the psychological dimension in Browning has recently been highlighted by Mick Mangan's analysis of the interpretive problems posed by the monologue speaker. Because this "type of character . . . is uniquely different from novelistic or dramatic character in that no larger purposive literary structure exists to contextualize" it, "the structure is the speech is the character" (6). Therefore the reader must depend entirely on his or her own "inference" to establish some "context" for psychological interpretation of the speaker, a necessity which, Mangan argues, rules out the possibility of making "moral judgments" of character (6-7)--and rules out, I would add, any other of the kinds of epistemological or value judgments involved in thematic analysis--that could be used with any significant degree of certainty as direct evidence of the poet's thematic intentions. From the monologues we can tell what themes and situations Browning is <u>interested in</u>, but not what he <u>thinks</u>.

Mangan's approach to the monologues in terms of their generic uniqueness thus arrives at the same point that major formalist critics of Browning reach by way of their close readings of a wide variety of monologues and at the same point that Peckham reaches by way of his analysis of Browning's epistemology: in the monologues, the issue of the speaker's psychology subsumes all other issues. Everything said is modified by and filtered through the speakers' characteristic mode of thinking, so that the only kind of truth to which we have direct access "is a truth of character" (Cadbury 50), the truth that Bernard J. Paris terms "mimetic truth" (<u>Character and Conflict</u> 21)--not "truth about

experience" but "truth to it" (Psychological Approach 286). For example, Andrea del Sarto's "a man's reach should exceed his grasp, / Or what's a heaven for?" (97-98) may or may not reflect Browning's philosophy (what he believes to be "truth about experience"), but it surely reveals (is true to) something about Andrea's psychological defense system, with its remarkable capacity to transform his personal failures and disappointments into what seem to be statements of humankind's universal condition--statements that momentarily allow him to interpret his problems as the result of a gloriously cosmic fatality into which he has exceptional insight. His idea, then, has significance, but its psychological significance subsumes its thematic significance. Whether this state of affairs reflects a position that Browning developed through a conscious philosophical process, as Peckham implies, or arises as the monologues emerge from his character-creating impulse, as I tend to believe, the implication is clear: to read the monologues is first and foremost to read the speakers' characters--to interpret psychologically.

This task of psychological interpretation will necessarily draw the monologue reader into an unusually direct and concentrated encounter with the speaker as a created personality. This "collaboration" (Shaw 3) by the reader--necessary, as Isobel Armstrong notes, because "Browning's poems are really incomplete until they have been created, synthesised and interpreted in a reader's mind" ("Browning and the 'Grotesque' Style" 97)--has been variously described. Armstrong conceives of it as "a subtle play between the construction" of "an order" by the monologuist "and the discovery" of

"the true nature of the experience" by the reader ("Browning and the 'Grotesque' Style" 99), a formulation according authority over the poem's meaning to the reader. Loy D. Martin describes the interpretive field of the Browning monologue in terms of a system in which Browning's "poetic self" and his "listener, the reader, must . . . participate in an active, creative interaction," a relationship of "interdependence" in which the reader is "invite[d] and even require[d] . . . to fill in the continuum with his own imaginative participation in the making of the fiction" (160-61).

I am inclined to see the monologue speaker as the primary target of the reader's inferential processes, as Armstrong does, and would emphasize, with her, that the meaning of the speaker's psychological situation is the primary kind of meaning to be inferred. On the other hand, Martin's conception of the way the reader must "fill in" gaps in order to understand a Browning poem is similar, as he notes (160), to the poet's own prefatory description of the interpretive process required of the reader of Paracelsus:

> A work like mine depends more immediately [than "a drama"] on the intelligence and sympathy of the reader for its success--indeed were my scenes stars it must be his co-operating fancy which, supplying all chasms, shall connect the scattered lights into one constellation--a Lyre or a Crown. (1: 65)

The general applicability of this statement should not be overestimated, however. The five "scenes" ("stars") in Paracelsus are after all "scattered lights" because they present relatively small segments of Paracelsus's life with very long time lapses ("chasms") between them; these the reader must fill in to make a picture of the hero's psychic history (the "one constellation").

A dramatic monologue, unlike Paracelsus, presents the speaker synchronically in the sense that we have available the speaker's view of things during just one quite limited slice of his or her life; though (s)he may and often does talk enough about events in the past to make it possible to reconstruct much of his or her psychic history, the "constellation" to be inferred, closely packed into the text, is the interlocking structure of inner conflicts, defense mechanisms, fantasies, compulsively valued ideals, and the like that characterizes the speaker's life at a given time--or put another way, at the time that is given. Though inferences about this psychic structure are of course still open to influence from the reader's psychic structure--that is, are vulnerable to the effects of projection--a monologue text should not be regarded as so indeterminate as to make all inferences about Browning's speakers equally "good" or "valid."

The problems encountered in making the inferences necessary to the task of psychological interpretation are, however, far from easy, as Justin McCarthy complained in 1880: "Mr. Browning commonly allows the study of the purely psychological to absorb too much of his moods and of his genius," he grumbles; "there are times when he is only to be understood at the expense of as much thought and study as one might give to a controverted passage in an ancient author" (468). Not much susceptible, apparently, to the fascination of what is difficult, McCarthy has nonetheless identified the primary challenge Browning offers his readers: to make psychological sense of his characters and of his poetic forms. In attempting to meet this challenge, the critic

faces the additional problem of drawing valid psychological inferences from a monologue text in the face of possible projective bias.

To formulate and test a psychological approach to Browning responsive to these challenges--an approach focused on the poet's most characteristic and most psychologically centered genre, the dramatic monologue--will be my purpose here. Given the skepticism of currently dominant critical theories about the status of human selves as traditionally conceived and their even greater skepticism about the status of those imagined selves called literary characters, the issue of the validity of a psychological approach to Browning's speakers and the further epistemological issues surrounding the making of inferences about such literary selves--how such inferences are to be made and if possible separated from projective bias--must first be considered. Examination of these issues, I will argue, suggests the appropriateness of a psychoanalytic model of interpretation for my purpose. The other preliminary issue to present itself is that of which psychological theory or theories might most appropriately be used in specifying and shaping such a model. Given the shortcomings as well as the contributions of previous psychological approaches to Browning, I will suggest a return to the phenomena to be explained--the monologue texts--as the first step in arriving inductively at a choice of theories suitable for use in further refining and testing a psychological approach to Browning's monologue speakers and monologue forms.

I

Currently fashionable critical theory does not provide a hospitable context for a project such as mine. Herbert F. Tucker, Jr., points out that character analysis is usually "slighted" by deconstructionists because their approach questions "the notion of 'character,' with its assumptions about the coherence and continuity of the self." Yet since "Browning certainly believed in the self," this deconstructionist adds in reference to his own work, "it would be a strange book, on this of all poets, that disregarded his imaginative construction of compellingly self-conscious personalities" (Browning's Beginnings 9). I will not attempt here to refute deconstructionist skepticism as to the existence of a relatively stable self, as traditionally conceived. The history of philosophy offers ample evidence that arguments about similar differences in first principles --for example, the existence or nonexistence of God--are not amenable to rational resolution; such disputes regularly come down to statements that are more or less disguised versions of Tennyson's "I have felt." Given this ultimate uncertainty as to the status of the self, real or literary, Tucker has done well, I feel, by giving weight to Browning's belief that, as J. Hillis Miller puts it, "each man, except perhaps the poet himself, has a permanent node or center of existence," an "unchanging selfhood" that "persists through all the vicissitudes of his life" (125).

Other critics' studies of Browning's prose have brought out even more forcefully his view of the self as a continuous entity which--always underlying even the apparently contradictory, fragmented, often

fleeting kinds of phenomena that deconstructionist theorists take to be all there is to the self--functions as the ground for psychological intelligibility of character when it is viewed over a long period--that is, diachronically. Examining a passage on interpreting character that Browning contributed to John Forster's Life of Strafford (1836), Michael Mason focuses on the poet's statement that Strafford "'was consistent to himself throughout . . .'" (253). Mason explains Browning's view that many times "'circumstance' will make a person's motivations seem incoherent and unstable but when these [motivations] are properly identified they will be found to be unified and permanent. . . . a man's character will be 'consistent' if analysed in enough depth" (254). In a similar vein, Donald Smalley finds in the "Essay on Chatterton" (1842) an emphasis upon a consistent "central tendency" (213) in each individual that "explains the whole of his hero's . . . superficially complex and ambiguous conduct . . ." (208). Given his view of the human psyche, Browning is likely to have conceived his characters in such a way that, given information about their past lives, we may appropriately see and analyze them as if they have selves which are continuous and relatively permanent psychic structures.

A further implication of Browning's essays is that synchronic analysis of character is also possible. He believed that a character's "central tendency . . . may . . . be found by the proper analysis of any single action . . ." (Smalley 213), that "every action of a man, however insignificant, will reveal all of him, if we can understand it" (J. Hillis Miller 125). If Browning's monologue characters are crafted from this point of view, it should be possible to analyze their

characters as currently existing structures, even though we do not see them in a variety of situations, over a considerable length of fictive time, as we have the opportunity to do with major characters in, say, a realistic novel. In short, Browning's outlook on character as reflected in his essays, where no intervening speaker subsumes the ideas into his or her psychological patterns, suggests that insofar as the poet's beliefs about human character influenced his poetic practice, his monologuists' motivations, present and past, are very likely to be analyzable in depth in terms of relatively persistent psychic configurations which may be inferred from the brief segments of their fictive lives which we have.

The exact nature of such inferences--the process through which they are made and the degree to which they may be separated from the reader's projections--remains at issue. E. Warwick Slinn suggests that we begin making these inferences by "engaging in some measure in a process of mind and emotion entirely analogous to that of the protagonist" (9); that is, we approach the character through empathy, as though (s)he were a real person. This procedure is of course controversial--outrageously naive, in the view of many twentieth-century critics; yet as we have seen, the dramatic monologue is preeminently psychological, posing as its central challenge the task of understanding the speaker.

Ralph W. Rader has seen more clearly than anyone else that given the nature of the genre, the best approach to this task is to accept that the monologuist's "'otherness'" ("Dramatic" 134) is to be understood

> in exactly the way all of us can and do understand the continuous purposive activity of another person when his activity is directed away from us toward an external goal. We fix our attention upon him and, losing all sense of ourselves, fill ourselves with a sense of his activity as, through an act of psychosomatic conflation and comparison, we empathically register the contrast in identity between ourselves as the "other" and ourselves as ourselves. ("Dramatic" 135)

The two aspects of this "double response" do not arise from "ethical or psychological ambiguity" in the text, but rather from the mental operations intrinsic in "the imaginative act" of "infer[ring] the speaker's inner purpose from his words and external acts . . ." ("Dramatic" 135).

This inferential process, Rader argues, relies on "our built-in cognitive capacity to read from the mind/body of the 'self' into that of the 'other'" ("Notes" 107). In the monologues, this reading takes place within "an artificial replication of [the] structure of interpersonal understanding" ("Dramatic" 135), but it is "based . . . directly on our natural capacity as human creatures to image and understand ourselves and others" ("Notes" 107). In a subtle move, Rader thus redefines the issue of treating mimetic monologue speakers as though they were real people. The world-text centered, ontological version of the issue (are these speakers enough like real people, and like them in the right ways, to be accorded that status in psychological analysis?) gives way to the reader-text centered, epistemological version: whatever the ontological status of these characters may be, is the way we understand them enough like the way we understand real people for them to be understood that way for purposes of psychological analysis? Rader's answer--that yes, we do understand

the speakers that way, that "we read poems as we read the world . . ." ("Notes" 107)--seems to me both intuitively sensible and critically sound, particularly given the psychological nature of the monologue form. Since his approach emphasizes the reader's "rapt" empathy with the speaker as the source of his or her knowledge of the speaker ("Notes" 113), Rader's account is consistent with an epistemology of psychology such as that of Heinz Kohut, who makes a persuasive case for empathy as a "powerful, potentially reliable, and . . . irreplaceable instrument of observation" ("Psychoanalyst" 2: 701).

Rader's conception of the "act of understanding" ("Notes" 113) as primarily empathic, holistic, and (at least initially) morally and epistemologically nonjudgmental also offers a way of unraveling the equivocations that confuse Tucker's deconstructionist view of the reader-text relationship in the dramatic monologue. Despite his recognition of Browning's "belie[f] in the self" and of the monologuists' "compellingly self-conscious personalities" (Browning's Beginnings 9), Tucker sees the dramatic monologue as a genre that "discredit[s] the lyric 'I'": it shows that "the self" is not an "authoritative voice" by "shak[ing]" "the reader's sympathetic confidence in the integrity of the self who speaks" ("From Monomania" 126). This formulation implies that the reader's sympathy with the speaker depends upon his or her "confidence in the integrity" of the speaker, with "integrity" evidently referring not only to the wholeness or unitary quality of a character, but also to a character's reliability or trustworthiness, in a moral sense. Similarly, the "authorit[y]" of the speaker's "voice," upon which the question of the

ontological status of the speaker's "self" is apparently seen to hinge, seems to be thought of in ethical terms, as though the authority were dependent upon whether the voice is a source of truth.

Rader's analysis allows us to see that on the contrary, the reader's empathic response to the monologue speaker is not contingent upon the speaker's winning our trust for and confidence in his or her moral character, but upon the speaker's winning our intense investment of fascinated attention in his or her total being. As Altick and Loucks have noted, because a dramatic monologue speaker "imposes his will on" others about whom (s)he speaks and in general "uses" any "misrepresentation" that (s)he wishes, it is difficult for a reader to tell when, if ever, "the speaker [may] be assumed to be telling the truth . . ." (30). But the crucial point about this situation is not that it undermines our confidence in the speaker and arouses our moral and epistemological anxieties, but that the speaker's possible--but uncertain--deceptiveness, in Altick and Loucks's words, "additionally characterizes" him or her (30) and thereby enhances his or her fascination.

This enhancement of characterization may in fact promote our confidence in our psychological insight if Armstrong is right in suggesting that the speaker's deceptiveness takes the form of "consistent distortions" pointing toward "a reading which is approximately 'right'" ("Browning and the 'Grotesque' Style" 116). Betty S. Flowers takes a less epistemologically preoccupied tack, arguing that when the reader detects a discrepancy "between the impression the character is in the process of creating [what she calls

"the mask"] . . . and the character beneath the impression," the response is "fascination" with "the ability of the character to create an explanation . . . which, by value of its very coherence, makes the ugliness of the deeds 'wither'" (106-08). From this point of view, the very detection of unreliability which according to Tucker "discredit[s]" "the self who speaks" ("From Monomania" 126) actually contributes to the reader's interest in and empathy with the speaker's psychological being, decreases the reader's interest in moral judgment of the speaker, and enhances the reader's impression of the wholeness of the speech.

The total effect of these responses is likely to be a conflation of psychological empathy with a sense of aesthetic unity--a merging of responses that would tend to strengthen our impression of the speaker as a unified self. Perhaps Rader is referring to such a phenomenon when he observes that in "full aesthetic appreciation" of dramatic monologues, "empathy" governs our response ("Notes" 113). In any case, a good deal of critical opinion suggests that Browning's monologues do not undermine the authority of the self by exposing its contradictions and dissimulations, as Tucker would have it, so much as they assert and elevate its authority by demonstrating the power of the self to override epistemological and moral reservations enough to draw the reader's empathic capacities into its psychological field. In this respect the Browning monologue is antiphilosophical and antididactic, not subverting the self but resisting the ideological interpretations that would confine or attenuate its centripetal psychological force.

"The contrast in identity" between us and the speaker, which Rader sees as qualifying our dominant empathic identification with him or her and thus completing our knowledge of the character ("Dramatic" 135), seems problematic in view of the monologuist's strong appeal to empathy. Psychologically sophisticated readers must suspect that our empathic involvement in the speaker's viewpoint not only gives us knowledge of what Langbaum (adopting a phrase from M. W. MacCallum) calls "facts from within" (78), but also leaves us unusually prone to project our own psychic qualities into the area of empathic overlap between us and the character. As the work of Norman N. Holland and others has shown, our way of reading any literary work is affected by our personal psychology; but the dramatic monologue, with its subordination of everything else to the speaker's personality and its invitation to empathy as appropriate response, seems to me especially likely to become a projective test for its readers. We must therefore consider whether there is any way to clarify "the contrast in identity" that Rader posits as completing our understanding of the monologue speaker--to control, or to sort out from our empathic response, at least a significant portion of the projected material and thus to snatch from the jaws of solipsistic indeterminacy a basis for valid psychological interpretation of the monologue speaker.

It is probably impossible for any reader entirely to prevent his or her personality from affecting his or her interpretation of a Browning monologue (or any other literary work, for that matter); nor would the invention of such an impersonal criticism necessarily be a desirable goal, for literature cannot matter to us in the absence of an

emotional as well as an intellectual relationship to the text: the most disappointing experience of a text that we can have is to find that it "leaves us cold." The question is whether we can attain a relatively clear separation between ourselves and the monologue speaker, can realize Rader's "contrast in identity" ("Dramatic" 135), and can thus achieve "an analytical distance" from the character that will allow us to arrive at the kind of interpretation we have achieved when, "at the end of the poem, the reader, like a good psychologist, understands the character better than he appears to understand himself" (Flowers 56-57).

Flowers suggests two possible approaches to this problem. The first models the reader's task as a kind of detective work: by identifying the speaker's "tendency to present the facts in a light favourable to [him]self," "construct[ing] a false logic of his own," the reader "analyse[s] the bias of the speaker so that objective fact can be separated from subjective interpretation" (Flowers 56). This model for getting "analytical distance" (Flowers 56) is problematic because it assumes the existence of some set of "fact[s]" against which all the statements in the text (statements of uncertain truth value) can be checked; but there is no such set of facts-as-they-really-were, independent of the speaker's point of view, because there is no world-outside-the-speech from which they could be ascertained. The detective model thus seems inadequate to our situation.

Flowers mentions another possible model, however: that of the psychologist coming to understand a patient. Indeed, the monologue reader's position is very much like that of a consulting psychologist

or psychoanalyst who has only a patient's account of himself or herself on a set of tapes, and no other sources, to use in developing a diagnosis (psychological interpretation) of the patient's condition. In such a situation, theory plays a major role in enabling the analyst's interpretation to emerge from empathic engagement with the material provided by the patient, with self-knowledge also aiding in the movement toward disentanglement of his or her own psychic content from the patient's (for example, by the dissolution of countertransference phenomena). With this movement, the contrast in identity becomes sufficiently clear to allow the emergence of interpretation of the data in terms of psychological theory.

I would suggest that a similar process, accommodating both empathic and analytic responses, can be achieved through the use of psychological theory in the reading of Browning's monologues. For the reason mentioned earlier in relation to the detective model, I doubt that this psychoanalytic model of interpretation can yield "objective fact" (Flowers 56) about the speaker's world, though I think, as I have argued elsewhere, that it might allow us to estimate the relative likelihood that a speaker is telling the truth (Lewis 156-57). I think that such a model can, however, yield a method of reading monologues--and by extension, the genre--that is situated within an appropriate special type of Rader's "artificial replication of [the] structure of interpersonal understanding" ("Dramatic" 135): the structure of psychoanalytic observation and interpretation.

II

Assuming a general psychoanalytic model, the choice of a theory or theories to guide and support one's analytic response to the monologues remains open. Surveying the small body of psychological criticism of Browning will provide some preliminary insights into the shortcomings to be remedied and the advantages to be sought in the selection of a theory appropriate to the task.

C. N. Wenger's 1941 Freudian account of Browning's dramatic monologues, in many respects still the most comprehensive psychoanalytic view of these poems available, sees the monologues as heavily "disguised" "poetic sublimations of" Browning's serious psychological "derangements" (226) and the monologue speakers as his "disguised doubles for himself" (236) through whom he gave "his subconscious conflicts an outlet, or mediative release" (238). Wenger believes that Browning adopted the dramatic monologue form in response to the "traumati[c]" "shock" of reading Mill's notes (made for a planned review of "Pauline") about the poet's "'morbid self-consciousness'": Browning felt exposed and was driven "ever after to mask" himself (232).

Wenger sees the resulting genre as having a good many weaknesses, which he explains as mainly resulting from the poems' function in Browning's psychic economy: he feels the monologuists are not "viable personalities" (235), largely because of the monologues' defensive function. Particularly when the speakers are from Browning's "own era," so that he cannot easily remain "somewhat aloof from" them, their "disturbances" threaten him to the point that he must let them "remain

enigmatic shadow-types" (227); and because the speakers are his "spokesmen," the poet has "favorable biases" toward them and treats "only [those] partial aspects" and "traits" of their characters that overlap his concerns, especially psychic issues aroused by Victorian "crises" of values (234-35).

Wenger's account of the general psychological function of the monologues for Browning strikes me as quite likely to be right, though I doubt that Browning's major conflicts were caused by Victorian cultural break-up (227). He and his characters seem to be conscious of such issues: Bishop Blougram, for example, is portrayed as fully aware of the advancing religious skepticism that causes his own apparent belief to astound many people; Sludge is presented as quite conscious that his opportunities have arisen from his victims' desire for evidence of a realm of spirits whose existence would bolster a quasi-religious world view; Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau justifies his policies as bastions against looming social instability and breakdown; Fra Lippo Lippi knows that traditional religious values, including his own, are turning into hypocritical conventionalities; and the Pope in The Ring and the Book knows the same thing, especially from his examination of the case of Guido, who knows the same thing and knows in addition that the system of aristocratic privilege he so greatly values is falling apart under the pressures applied by an upwardly mobile, free-enterprising merchant class. Furthermore, Wenger does not mention the number of psychological crises in the monologues which, like Guido's bourgeois phobia, do not have parallels in Browning's biography; nor does his preoccupation with assigning delimited

cultural-biographical causes to explain Browning's and the characters' inner conflicts help us to see the characters' patterns of conflict. His sense of the speakers as incomplete personalities may stem from this methodological weakness.

Wenger's formulations of a psychodynamic account of the genre is perhaps his strongest contribution. The monologuists speak in response to the pressure of conflicts "between dominant and competing selves" (235)--conflicts that often have been stirred up by the listeners' perceived "critic[al]" stance toward them (228). In defending their "dominant . . . selves" to the external "critics" (228), the speakers are really trying to "silence" their inner "accusers" and thus to regain their psychic equilibrium (229). This account of what happens in a Browning monologue, unlike Wenger's interpretations of individual monologues as being responses to some specific topic, recognizes that the speech reveals the conflicting impulses and trends that structure the speaker's entire personality. Wenger makes an important step here toward a psychological analysis of the genre by suggesting that some particular kind of psychological emergency to which the speaker's character structure is vulnerable typically provokes and sets the course for a Browning monologue.

Barbara Melchiori's ventures into Freudian analysis of some aspects of Browning's poetry are noteworthy, though she does not attempt a systematic psychoanalytic reading. Melchiori does not identify Browning's specific inner conflicts with those of his characters, as Wenger does, but instead sees behind the monologue as a genre the poet's "problem of artistic reticence": a "conflict between

his wish to guard jealously his own thoughts and feelings, and the pressing necessity he was under to reveal them" (1). Melchiori believes Browning uses the monologuists as "a cover" that allows him to resolve this reticence-revelation dilemma (2). Though Melchiori is herself rather reticent as to the psychoanalytic import of this dilemma, its parallel with the central issue of the anal phase--that is, "holding onto or giving up" "a treasured part of [one]self" (Holland 39)--is clear enough.

The poet's fixation in the same developmental stage is implied in her discussion of Browning's "broken-tomb theme," which she associates "with the extreme need . . . to keep buried things buried, [with] his dread of all exposure" (132); it is stated in her examination of his "exaggerated and abnormal" preoccupation with money (70), his frequent associations of gold with dung, and his innumerable "coprophilic" images (80-83). The poet's "hoard[ing of] money-words," trivia, and arcane vocabulary and his "'unloading'" them in his work are also discussed in relation to anal character (84-86).

An approach to the dramatic monologue influenced by Jung's concept of "synchronistic events" is suggested in Ashton Nichols's discussion of several poems in relation to episodes when "a sudden concentration of intense significance in the momentary details of an otherwise ordinary experience" leads to "character revelation" (96, 81-82). Nichols conceives of character as arising from such epiphanies, through which the relationship of "the present to a previously established pattern of thought" is illuminated and associated with "a powerful sense of . . . value" (82-84). As (or if) the significance of such an

experience later "unfolds" (98), the result is a process of "self-definition" (92). This account of the psychological workings of the monologues is largely based on love poems which, lacking a fully realized speaker who clearly is not the poet (Rader, "Dramatic" 140), perhaps should not be regarded as true dramatic monologues; nonetheless, Nichols relates his analysis to an established psychological theory in light of which the experiences of these particular speakers may be seen as sources or potential sources of greater self-understanding and personal unity. The central events in these poems thus appear much more constructive than do those in the monologues that Wenger examines, in which the speaker tries to remedy a psychic disruption and restore homeostasis to what remains an essentially divided personality.

Gregory Bateson's concept of the cybernetics of self is the basis for Martin's analysis of the self as Browning presents it in his monologues: a component of "a systemic reality" (158) in which the speaker "lacks [the] fixed boundaries," "discreteness," and "underlying wholeness" (109) of a separate, "fully realized self" (31). This "cybernetic self" exists only as part of "an open-ended, nonstatic system" that includes "all substance and all mind" (158) in a continuous mutual interchange. Martin sees in this cybernetic view of the self Browning's version of the Romantics' poetic "pursui[t]" of a "sublime synthesis" that would cure human beings' alienation from themselves, others, and the non-human environment and thus would "restor[e] . . . lost unity" and "wholeness" (23-25). Browning's revision of the Romantic approach, Martin argues, was to seek this

synthesis not in a "higher," transcendent state, but in a process of continual "disalienation" (24-25) within the "greater" (but not "'higher'") "power" (159) of the system within which the cybernetic self exists (24-25). Dramatic monologues present the speakers as cybernetic selves seeking "meaningful reciprocity and exchange" with their auditors within such an interdependent system (133).

It is not entirely clear whether Martin sees the poet as having anticipated Bateson's theory or as having created characters whose way of being can be psychologically analyzed in terms of Bateson's theory. The latter alternative seems to me the more interesting. If the monologuists typically appear, to us or to themselves, to be functioning (or seeking to function) as part of a system in which a self both merges with and takes into itself the "power" (159) of the system, then Martin has developed a generalization about Browning's speakers that may be interpreted as he interprets it--in the context of Bateson's critique of Western views of the self--but that might also be interpreted in the light of some other psychological theory or theories, where it could take on a different meaning.

A similar generalization based on the entire canon emerges from J. Hillis Miller's phenomenological approach to Browning's poetry. Assuming that "all an author's writings form a living unity" that may be thought of as a "structure of consciousness" (x), Miller describes Browning's authorial consciousness in terms of two phases between which he "vacillates" (84). In the first, Browning "is a huge sea" or "primal chaos"; lacking "separate individuality," he feels that he is "inside" everything, or that everything is in him (81-82). The

similarity of this state to that of Martin's cybernetic self is striking; so is the resemblance, in content at least, of these recent descriptions to George Santayana's critique of Browning's "barbarous soul," with its "conscious[ness] of obscure depths within itself which it fancied to be infinite," its "vague sympathy with wind and cloud and with the universal mutation" (64), and its resulting tendency to produce "a thought and an art inchoate and ill-digested" (57). Miller's portrait of Browning's primary state is of a face familiar to us from a range of Browning criticism.

The other major psychological phase that Miller finds in the Browning canon arises from the "motion" and "organizing power" that give to "each seed of life" in the primordial "Browning-sea" a "latent impulse to take form" and "dominate the whole sea" (82-83). When that impulse becomes pressing, he "leap[s] beyond" the sea, thus entering the second phase of "concentration" (85) in a "central self," "an empty, lucid self-awareness" now "isolated" from the rest of the world (90-91), like Martin's alienated self. This phase is characterized by "horror" at his "limitation" (85): he has a definite form, or self, but it thwarts his "self-aggrandiz[ing]" yearning for boundlessness, for infinite comprehensiveness (91, 94). Consequently there inheres in this phase, as in the other, an "inadequacy" (85) that drives the Browning-consciousness either to try "to identify . . . with God" (95)--a project which, though in the guise of a religious impulse (95; cf. Martin 159), is actually another version of the primary phase--or to "return to chaos," only to respond to another impulse toward "crystallization" (85), and so on and on.

Miller studiously avoids labeling these phases or their alternations; yet his insights, seconded by Martin's, are the most suggestive ones we have available as we attempt to define more precisely the nature of the "primitive feeling" which, as G. K. Chesterton perceived long ago, underlies "the whole of Browning's poetry," making it "realistic upon a point upon which nothing else [besides literature] can be realistic, . . . the actual desires of man," "those great eternal and mainly forgotten wishes," called "motives," which are simply "pictures of happiness" (184-85). Wenger's account of the dramatic monologue, on the other hand, seems to provide our best clues about the genre whereby Browning represents these motives as they operate within the current defense systems of particular poem-people, producing few "pictures of happiness" (Chesterton 185) or "serenity," but many portraits of "men and women [who] are confused, disturbed, tortured" (King, Bow and the Lyre 129), "all separate," and though not "all selfish" in the ordinary sense, "all solitary at the core, and egoistic--self-explaining, self-admiring, self-pitying" ("Robert Browning" 342).

Though previous psychological approaches to Browning have yielded significant insights, none of them seems to me to make a compelling case for applying one particular theory to Browning's monologue speakers and forms. Nichols's application of Jung, though suggestive for the love poems he treats, shows less promise for explaining the kind of speaker typical of the dramatic monologue proper, and his use of one Jungian concept of course does not test the workability of the theory as a whole for analysis of Browning's work. Melchiori's

application of Freud sheds some light on the poet's personality, but does not engage at length with individual speakers or with the monologue form.

Wenger's progress toward developing a psychodynamic description of the genre is notable, but based as it is on just four late monologues and focused as it is upon the relationship of the poems' topical content to certain external circumstances of Browning's life, the generic description does little to specify the psychological moves that might typify the monologues' total internal structure. Nor does Wenger deal with the issue of possible psychological commonalities among even the few monologuists he deals with. J. Hillis Miller's phenomenological approach, like Martin's work, yields a most suggestive view of the Browningesque "structure of consciousness" (x). However, since it takes into account the entire canon, it does not deal specifically with individual monologue speakers as realistic characters or with the dramatic monologue as a form manifesting a particular kind of psychic substructure or psychodynamic pattern. The non-psychological, thematic purpose toward which his analysis is directed makes it difficult to guess what the ultimate psychological implications of his work might be.

Altogether, no psychological theory that has been tried with Browning has emerged as unquestionably well suited to deal with his monologue speakers and structures. Two reasons for this do emerge from our survey. No psychological approach except J. Hillis Miller's has worked inductively from a large enough sample of the poems to make a convincing case that the patterns identified as central for the

selected works are also typical of the body of works in question. And no such approach seems to have based the choice of a theory or theories to be used upon such an inductively developed view of the common psychological features of the Browning texts to be dealt with. Given the importance of this choice in specifying and shaping a psychoanalytic model for interpreting Browning's monologue speakers and structures, the inductive development of such a set of common traits and patterns is a critical first step, necessary to provide a basis for a hypothesis as to what theoretical concepts will best match and most fruitfully relate the data to be explained. Accordingly, my next chapter, based on twenty or so monologues, will infer patterns of character and experience common in Browning's speakers, patterns from which it will be possible to develop a composite psychological profile representing the prototypical Browning monologuist.

CHAPTER 2
BROWNING'S SPEAKERS: PATTERNS OF CHARACTER AND EXPERIENCE

Any model must of course grow out of a careful examination of the data it is intended to explain, and a psychoanalytic model for interpreting Browning's monologue speakers, whose psychodynamics in turn shape their speeches, is no exception. Promising findings of critics such as Martin and J. Hillis Miller may suggest lines of investigation to be refined and specified if the data seem to support such a move. However, the texts representing the monologuists--the details of their language and self-reported actions, the nuances of their feelings--must be regarded as paramount. These data provide the only legitimate basis for generalizations about what psychological phenomena recur so regularly among these characters that, aggregated in a composite profile of a prototypical Browning monologuist, they should be used as the basis for the next step: examining and selecting theoretical concepts to be integrated into our psychoanalytic model and within that framework, further refined and tested.

Given this key function of inferred generalizations in model building and, just as important, given the role of empathy in our understanding of the individual speakers whose characters must be registered with sensitivity in these generalizations, the inductive process based upon the specific data of the Browning texts should be

regarded not merely as a means to the end of developing a composite profile, but in addition as an exploration of the data. In the course of this exploration we may feel our way into the inner lives of the individual monologuists, may begin to grasp the complexities of their way of experiencing the world, and may thus prepare to approach our next step with a heightened awareness of the range of phenomena that our chosen theory or theories must be able to deal with. With two purposes in mind, then--to engage with the data and feel their resistance to categorization, as well as to generalize about them--I will examine in some detail the configurations of experience unique to each of a number of monologuists in order not only to document the basis for positing five traits or psychological patterns especially conspicuous and widespread among Browning's speakers, but also to define these common characteristics of the prototypical Browning monologuist in a way that will maintain as much as possible the integrity of the cases from which the generalizations have been made.

I

Among the recurrent qualities of Browning's speakers, one of the most noticeable is their sense of themselves as performers. This quality is not identical with the generic characteristic that the dramatic monologue "speaker is directing his words to somebody other than the reader" (Armstrong, "Browning and the 'Grotesque' Style" 116) or with Browning's metaphoric emphasis on "the theatrical side of human relationships" (Gibson 165). Nor should it be transmuted into a general theory of personality sometimes attributed to Browning: that the self is only a "mask" made of "language" and presented in "the

theater" of "the world" (Peckham, "Personality" 91, 117); that the self is "the product" of "histrionic" "verbal acts" (Slinn ix) or of "role-playing" (Nelson 91; cf. Garratt 116); that in short "the self . . . [is] theatrical" (Posnock 9). It is many of the poet's speakers who clearly show their "aware[ness] of being dramatis personae" (Ryals 250). That feeling, often manifested in outright exhibitionism, is a central experience for the psychologically prototypical monologuist.

The speaker of "Porphyria's Lover," for example, conspicuously displays himself in describing the "thing" he "found / . . . to do" about Porphyria (37-38): "all her hair / . . . I wound" (38-39); "I warily oped her lids" (44); "I untightened next the tress" (46); "I propped her head up" (49); "And thus we sit together now" (58), he concludes, as though, having reviewed his stage directions, he has now envisioned himself and Porphyria in a final tableau. The speaker in "The Laboratory" invites her poison-making auditor to watch her exploits as she describes them: to envision the dramatic glare which she turned on her rival the night before (33-36); to imagine her cleverly fooling her rival and her unfaithful lover into thinking she has "fled to the drear / Empty church" when in fact she is buying poison to kill the other woman (7-8); and to picture her dancing at the king's ball, where she will soon do the deed (21-24, 48). The Duke of "My Last Duchess" seats his audience; pulls back "The curtain" from the Duchess's picture (10); and--apparently looking at the portrait at least part of the time--"restage[s] the . . . drama of his domestic life" (Shaw 94) in the presence of his wife, who, "Looking as if she were alive" (2), must appear to the watching envoy something like a

second actor on the stage, "stand[ing]" (4) quite still in the background because her male lead will not tolerate being upstaged.

The dying bishop arranges his listeners "round [his] bed" ("The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church" 2) as though he were blocking the scene; he tries to control the ad lib "whisper[ing]" of the supporting cast (63); he makes himself an exhibit as he describes the way he imagines his body transformed into the effigy on his tomb (85-90); and, as his cast/audience leave, he remains the actor/director to the end, turning himself into the Body with the altar as a stage and giving the instructions appropriate to his role: "going, turn your backs / --Ay, like departing altar-ministrants . . ." (120-21).

Another ecclesiastical authority, Bishop Blougram of "Bishop Blougram's Apology," compares his position in an age of doubt to that of a daring performer with all eyes on him:

> You see lads walk the street
> Sixty the minute; what's to note in that?
> You see one lad o'erstride a chimney-stack;
> Him you must watch--he's sure to fall, yet stands!
> Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things.
> The honest thief, the tender murderer,
> The superstitious atheist, demirep
> That loves and saves her soul in new French books--
> We watch while these in equilibrium keep
> The giddy line midway: one step aside,
> They're classed and done with. I, then, keep the line
> Before your sages. . . . (391-402)

Later, arguing that in comparison to Shakespeare, he "realizes" (505) more than the bard ever did of the possessions and status both value, Blougram points out that Shakespeare could only imagine "'Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal,'" whereas, the bishop says, "I . . . play that personage, / The very Pandulph Shakespeare's fancy made . . ." (519-24). In another mood, but still regarding himself as a performer,

Blougram likens himself to a morality play figure of mankind: "God stoops o'er his head, / Satan looks up between his feet--both tug-- / He's left, himself, i' the middle . . ." (694-96). Always consciously exhibiting himself to Gigadibs, his listener, Bishop Blougram makes clear his sense of himself as a performer.

Andrea del Sarto's recollection of his "festal year at Fontainebleau" is the recollection of a performance--of "Put[ting] on the glory, Rafael's daily wear," as though he were costuming himself for the stage, and of "painting proudly" for King Francis and "All his court," his "hand kept plying by" his audience's "fire of souls / Profuse" ("Andrea del Sarto" 150-61). The painter envisions a future in heaven that is much the same: "new chances, one more chance" to exhibit his talent on one of "Four great walls in the New Jerusalem," sharing top billing with Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Michelangelo (260-63). Meanwhile, in the present, he mounts only a brief production; having pointed out to Lucrezia that an "arm is wrongly put" (111) on a Raphael painting he has, Andrea makes his most active bid for her attention with a dramatic corrective sketch on the painting and then, typically enough, sabotages his own performance as his wife looks on: "I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see, / Give the chalk here--quick, thus the line should go! / Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!" (195-97).

Far bolder, the "'medium'" David Sludge explains his activities as "story-telling" ("Mr. Sludge, 'The Medium'" 192); as the "performance" of a role in which his patrons have cast him (238); as "Acting, or improvising" (428) in a "play" or "certain pleasant interludes" (646-

47); as being a "tom-fool" in a "patchwork" costume (659-60). Now, performing has taken on such a central place in Sludge's existence that he resorts to a metaphor of performance to express the way he experiences his essential selfhood: "Myself am whole and sole reality / Inside a raree-show and a market-mob / Gathered about it . . ." (909-11). Especially acute here is Sludge's sense of his psychological predicament: only performing convinces him of his status as a real person.

Don Juan of the long and late monologue Fifine at the Fair is the only Browning speaker who develops something resembling the general theory of personality, sometimes attributed to his creator, that all selves arise from theatricality. However, Juan's version of this theory is closely tied both to his consciously self-exculpatory rhetoric and to a broader context that relates the actor element in personality to a stable selfhood that exists independent of performance. These connections allow us to see how Juan's conscious view of human selfhood helps him to evade Sludge's conscious sense of having become a person who only feels real when he performs. Thus seen as an elaborate defense against the implications of a psychological predicament common among Browning's characters, Juan's casuistry emerges as definitive of their condition generally.

The task facing Don Juan is to persuade his wife Elvire that his smitten fascination with Fifine, a member of a troop of acrobats and actors the couple have just seen at a local fair, not only does not in any way cast doubt upon his love for and loyalty to Elvire, but also opens up lines of philosophical inquiry the pursuit of which (recorded

in the monologue) makes Juan a better person. In this rhetorically challenging situation, Juan attempts to demonstrate that far from indicating an attraction to cheap thrills, his interest in Fifine indicates his "hate of falsehood" (1472). "Actors" like her, Juan argues, do what everyone does; but they openly acknowledge that "'A lie is all we do or say'" (1474-81). Thus it is admirably consistent with his dedication to truthfulness that he "prize[s] stage-play, the honest cheating" (1517), and treasures an honest actress like Fifine.

By considering her as an example, Juan next discovers a couple of universal principles: having "a false outside" is inevitable for everyone; and it is a good thing because the "false outside" protects the "truth . . . within" a person (1505-06). To lay the groundwork for these conclusions, Juan first defines all people as "mimes / And mummers" (1869-70). Fifine is one of these, but so were Juan and Elvire when they went together, "Like husband and like wife" (1520), to watch her. The three of them are in turn simply part of "a prodigious Fair" (1690) he has seen in a dream in which "Venice was the world; its Carnival--the state / Of mankind, masquerade in life-long permanence / For all time . . ." (1858-60). In this world, all people are "Always masked" (1693). Thus, Juan concludes, being actors with "a false outside" is our human condition, our fate. Any hypocrisy of his or any potentially discomfiting sense of being less authentic than others is therefore not the result of something wrong with him, but is a perfectly normal phenomenon that he, at least, understands perfectly.

Now Juan, having persuaded himself that his sense of the self as masking and performing is merely normal, proceeds to glorify this

condition as highly evolved and adaptive:

> . . . we must learn to live,
> Case-hardened at all points, not bare and sensitive,
> But plated for defense, nay, furnished for attack,
> With spikes at the due place, that neither front nor back
> May suffer in that squeeze with nature, we find--life.
> (1777-81)

The actor's mask is like armor for "the soul's self" (1789): it keeps the self "protected" so that it can "last forever" (1802, 1804). Thus Juan goes beyond defense to positive justification of a performative mode of relationship with others and in the end, uses his argument to reassure himself that a person's true, essential self is separate from and even preserved by an external, theatrical self. The stronger the second is, the more real and permanent is the first.

Don Juan's apparent certainty that a real self persists, independent of all theatricality, is very much at odds with the need that seems to drive his 132-section monologue. The monologue as a whole is aimed in large part at getting Elvire to accept his philosophized, moralized version of his interest in Fifine; and his account of why he responded to Fifine's flirtatious look and why he wants Elvire's "'recognition'" of his speech (1153) turns on his declaration that he "need[s] to be proved true" and to have it "confirm[ed]" he is "alive, not dead" (1155-56). He needs such confirmation, he says, to "convince" him that he is "a truth" (1357-58), needs recognition in order "to remain self-centred, fixed amid / All on the move" (1362-63). He has professed to <u>believe</u> in an immutable, inner, real self, but in order to <u>feel</u> that he is real ("a truth") and has a stable identity, Juan simply must have the

reassurance of an audience's response to his outward behavior--that is, to his performances for others. His praise of acting as a way of protecting the permanent inner identity he so positively claims to have now appears to be a defensive version of his actual situation: acting is his way of pursuing others' confirmation, upon which he depends for verification of being.

Delving into Juan's sense of himself as a performer has led us to see as the other side of this phenomenon his concern about his audience's response to him--particularly his preoccupation with her eyes and her smile and with her way of watching and gazing at him and his performances. Juan is uncomfortable when his association of Fifine with freedom and "lawlessness" (46) evokes a "slow shake of head" and a "melancholy smile" from Elvire (144) and becomes more uncomfortable when her "sad eyes probe [his] heart" (147); he is relieved when her "smile at last" returns (326). When Elvire's attention seems to him inadequate, he demands more: "Your husband holds you fast, / Will have you listen . . ." (462-63). Venting his frustration at Elvire's unreliable responses, he complains of his wife's

> "mixed unrest and discontent,
> Reproachfulness and scorn, with that submission blent
> So strangely, in the face, by sad smiles and gay
> tears,--
> Quiescence which attacks, rebellion which
> endears. . . ." (464-67)

The ambivalence of Elvire's "'mixed'" signals arouses Juan's anxiety; to get no response from her "'attacks'" his sense of himself; "'rebellion,'" at least, lets him know she has definitely noticed him.

His attachment to her focuses on his need for her to gaze at him, thus, as Slinn puts it, "confirm[ing] his existence" (146):

> . . . indeed your face fits into just the cleft
> O' the heart of me, Elvire, makes right and whole once more
> All that was half itself without you! . . .
> . . . . . .
> Never may eyes desist, those eyes so gray and grave,
> From their slow sure supply of the effluent soul within! (609-16)

Juan's statement here shows him to be fully conscious that he needs to get something in response to his performances: the "sure supply" of outpoured recognition that completes his sense of being. And his insight that he monitors Elvire's "face," especially her "eyes," to check that "supply" provides an important clue for understanding the significance of similar images for speakers who are much like Juan in their needs and expectations for audience response, but who seem less aware than he is of the meaning of their own preoccupations.

II

Building upon Fifine's unusually clear connection of Juan's sense of himself as a performer and his preoccupation with Elvire's reaction to his performances, it becomes possible to see that the typical monologuist's performative self-exhibition is one side of a coin, the other side of which is his or her need for others' attentive, validating response. This connection has not been generally recognized. Slinn's treatment of the auditor, for example, suggests that the speaker-audience relationship is important mainly as an "indicat[or] of" an intrapsychic drama in which one aspect of the speaker's psyche performs for another aspect (17-18, 74). Ross Posnock sees the auditor as "provid[ing] . . . a public stage" where we can observe the speaker as "a self responsive to the pressure of social

reality" (11). From this point of view, the performer is not actively seeking a response so much as (s)he is reactively giving one within an arena of society's making. Both Slinn and Posnock make valid points: the way the speaker relates to the audience does reveal much about his or her inner dynamics, as do the terms, societal or personal, in which (s)he perceives and responds to the audience as somehow demanding an exhibition of the self.

It seems to me, however, that the inner dynamics of monologue speakers, who conceive of themselves as performers, are expressed in active strivings to make the external world into a stage for their performances and to compel others to be the audience. Thus the speaker's relationship to the audience expresses a subjectivity that does respond to the world but, more importantly, presses the world to respond to him or her. As S. S. Curry says, the monologuist "demands a listener. He must have appreciation" (43). The force of that "must" has been most clearly recognized by Lee Erickson, who argues in reference to Honan, Langbaum, and Dorothy Mermin (much as I have argued in reference to Slinn) that they regard the dramatic monologue too much as "solipsistic," thus making the auditors mere "emanations of speakers' personalities" rather than emphasizing the way the auditors "affect and in some ways determine the speakers' selves" (156). The monologuists, Erickson argues, typically lack "a self-sufficient ego" (17) and thus require "recognition . . . , especially in the form of love," to get a "sense of self" (20).

This dependence on others' recognition, frequently signalled by preoccupation with others' faces, smiles, and eyes and with others'

watching and noticing the theatrical self, appears over and over in the monologues. The "moment" (36) of perfection that prompts the speaker in "Porphyria's Lover" to perform his murder is the moment at which her gazing eyes show her total attention and confirmation: "Be sure I looked up at her eyes / Happy and proud; at last I knew / Porphyria worshipped me. . ." (31-33). Once she is dead, Porphyria's gaze is the first thing her lover makes sure he has preserved to appreciate his performance: "I warily oped her lids: again / Laughed the blue eyes without a stain" (44-45). And she remains "smiling" and "glad" (52-53), further confirming him and his deed. Thus, as Linda M. Shires realizes, the lover attempts "to ensure his subjectivity--his presence as an authoritative 'I'--by fixing Porphyria forever as his worshipper (as constituting that 'I') . . ." (99).

Because he feels himself to be in a similar situation, Johannes Agricola is blissfully satisfied and secure in his identity because he feels that "God smiles" directly down on him as he lies looking up at "heaven," being eternally "smiled on, full-fed / By unexhausted power to bless . . ." ("Johannes Agricola in Meditation" 12, 1, 41-42). Johannes's image of himself as God's "child" (15) exchanging gazes with his Parent suggests that the attempt to recapture a very early relationship--a successful attempt, in Johannes's case--might well underlie other monologuists' need for satiation with looks of admiring confirmation.

The speaker of "The Laboratory" thinks of what she has lost and her rival gained as the lover's "masculine eyes" looking at the beloved (31). Similarly, in "My Last Duchess," the Duke's grievances against

his wife are expressed in terms of her failure to focus her attention--her approving looks and smiles--exclusively on him. The "earnest glance" (8) of the pictured face, which raises the question of "How such a glance came there" (12), "taunt[s] the Duke," as Tucker says, but not because he cannot understand it (Browning's Beginnings 178). He understands all too well that her look signals his failure to "control the direction of her gaze" (Erickson 82)--or at a deeper level, his failure to be the sole actor whose performances she cared to look at. The day that Fra Pandolf painted the portrait was only one of many times when the Duke noticed that "'twas not / Her husband's presence only, called that spot / Of joy into the Duchess' cheek . . ." (13-15; italics added); she was "too soon made glad, / Too easily impressed" by "whate'er / She looked on, and her looks went everywhere" (22-24). The Duke's "favour at her breast" (25), his "gift of a nine-hundred-year-old name" (33), and he himself were not "ranked" (32) far above everything else; performances other than his got the same "approving speech, / Or blush," or "thank[s]" (30-31), or "smiles" (46). Because "she smiled" (43) as though "'twas all one" (25), "all smiles stopped together" (46).

Robert F. Garratt (117) and Erickson (83) have seen that the Duke prefers the portrait to the woman because he is the sole proprietor of its visible signs of recognition and confirmation: it is still "Looking as if she were alive" (2) and looking with a smile at the Duke, his favored guests (but only when he allows that), and his performances before it. In fact, the painted Duchess even confers "The depth and passion of [her] earnest glance" (8) upon her husband as he

harshly criticizes her and justifies having disposed of her, making the scene we and the envoy see into an image of the relationship the Duke really wanted: without having "to stoop" (43) to ask for his wife's exclusive attention (thus admitting his inability to attract all her looks and smiles by the sheer magnetism of his being), he would have had at all times her absolute approval of all he said, did, and was.

Being looked at preoccupies the bishop as he orders his tomb. He recalls his sons' "tall pale mother with her talking eyes" (96), "so fair" that his archrival "Gandolf envied" him (5), apparently giving the speaker and his mistress looks that further confirmed the value of her gaze and his value as her possessor. In the present, however, the sons' "eyes" are "as a lizard's quick" (104), evidently offering no encouraging response to his pitch for a fine tomb, and he looks with dread toward an afterlife atop a third-rate tomb of "Gritstone" (116), "look[ing] at" Gandolf (32) while Gandolf "leers" at him (123) instead of gazing at the hoped-for tomb that "Gandolf sh[ould] not choose but see and burst" (50).

Bishop Blougram's consciousness of the way he is looked at and his interest in gaining appreciative responses are even more evident. When he remarks at the beginning that Gigadibs doubtless does not "despise" the material and social "<u>status</u>" of a bishop (21, 26), he is aware of his guest's "protesting eyes" (28) and continues to monitor Gigadibs's attitude throughout. Having enlarged upon the way "All eyes turn with interest" toward him (418), the bishop scrutinizes Gigadibs and observes, "Admire me as these [others] may, / You don't" (432-33). Repeatedly the bishop admits his interest in getting adulation and

exhibits his success in getting it from other people, then remarks that Gigadibs continues to frustrate him. "I need mankind's respect, / Obedience, and the love that's born of fear" (324-25), he admits; other audiences "kneel / And kiss [his] hand" (335-36), and "the world" in general gives him "Its estimation" (264-66). Yet Gigadibs is only

> remarking all this time
> How narrowly and grossly I view life,
> Respect the creature-comforts, care to rule
> The masses, and regard complacently
> "The cabin" [his life situation]. . . . (764-68)

Blougram repeats the pattern. He admits that he "needs" not only to dominate others, but also to have them confirm his sense of himself by inviting him to take the best of everything (892-96). And his need is fulfilled: "Women their lovers kneel to" come to him and "cut curls / From [his] fat lap-dog's ear to grace a brooch" and "Dukes . . . petition just to kiss [his] ring . . ." (907-09). Even so, his closing words to Gigadibs still indirectly demand the writer's future confirmation: he hopes that Gigadibs "will not wait" for pressure from the bishop's many admirers before he "discontinue[s]--not detesting, not / Defaming, but at least--despising me" (967-70). Unable to tolerate one holdout, Bishop Blougram so greatly needs the admiring confirmation of his immediate audience that he exhibits proof of others' adulation of him to Gigadibs, hoping at least to get admiration of all the admiration others accord to a great bishop.

The meek Andrea del Sarto is little different from these others. "But do not let us quarrel any more, / No, my Lucrezia" (1-2), he begins; and when his wife "turn[s her] face" toward him (4), he promises to paint "five pictures" (24) on whatever terms her "friend's

friend" (5)--evidently her lover's creditor--chooses to offer. Thus Andrea sets out to pursue the approving looks of his most intimate audience, despite his well-founded doubts that her "face . . . bring[s her] heart . . ." (4). His doubt embitters his acute desire for her faithfulness--a desire he expresses not in sexual terms, but in terms of exclusive gazes: he calls her "My face, . . . / Which everybody looks on and calls his, / And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn"; he is happy to gain a "smile" (29-33). He wishes that he could restore not her sexual interest in him, but her "first pride in" him (37), for that gave him the confirmation that he needs.

Adopting a strategy much like Blougram's, Andrea attempts to extract Lucrezia's admiration. He reminds her of others' high opinions of his work (56, 64-66, 76). As with Blougram, however, these apparently unproductive reminders lead to another direct appeal for attention from the immediate audience. Admitting that some other painters' "less is more" (78) because of their greater passion and aspiration, he adopts the position that lack of Lucrezia's confirmation has caused his artistic deficiencies (116-19, 132). Andrea's belief that Lucrezia's support would have conferred the artistic "soul" (118) that he lacks is strikingly similar to Don Juan's idea that Elvire completes his being. Unlike Don Juan, however, Andrea realizes that this kind of ontological dependence is not normal, that "incentives" should "come from the soul's self" (134), that his need to be completed by someone else makes him one of the world's "half-men" (140). Again like Don Juan, however, he defensively universalizes his personal

deficiency: "In this world, who can do a thing, will not; / And who would do it, cannot . . ." (137-38).

Andrea's conclusion that his predicament stems from an impersonal, universal situation--like his earlier statement that he "paint[s] from [him]self and to [him]self" and is "unmoved by men's blame / Or their praise either" (90-92)--is ironically exploded by a new round of anecdotes that convey the excruciating permeability of his personality, his agonizing dependence upon others' feedback to define him. Being denied others' looks profoundly threatens him: he is afraid to go out because he might meet "the Paris lords," who, knowing that he misappropriated King Francis's money to spend on his own house, at "best" "pass and look aside" (146-47). In sharp contrast are his memories of being nurtured at Francis's court during a "long festal year" (150) when he

> could sometimes leave the ground,
> Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
> In that humane great monarch's golden look,
> One finger in his beard or twisted curl
> Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
> One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
> The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
> I painting proudly with his breath on me,
> All his court round him, seeing with his eyes. . . .
> (151-59)

Finally, at the court Lucrezia's "face" was "in the background, waiting on my work, / To crown the issue with a last reward!" (162-64).

This "life" was "golden" (168) for Andrea because confirmation was transfused into him directly, almost physically, by King Francis's "golden look," his "smile," his comradely embrace, and "his breath," which resembles in effect the breath of God conferring life on Adam. To "Put on the glory" (165) was possible because he felt the glory of

Francis and his court being poured into him in the form of admiring approval of his painterly performance. Without such approval, he is depleted and limited, "the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt / Out of the grange whose four walls make his world" (169-70).

Still angling for Lucrezia's admiration as he attempts to draw sustenance from his memories, Andrea tells another story about Michelangelo's having said to Raphael, years before, that if Andrea "'were . . . set to plan and execute / '. . . pricked on by . . . popes and kings,'" he "'Would bring the sweat'" to Raphael's "'brow'" (191-93). Momentarily energized by his own story, Andrea temporarily corrects the misdrawn arm on his Raphael for Lucrezia "to see" (195) and, referring again to what Michelangelo said, discovers that his wife has "forg[otten] already words like those . . ." (200). Yet when she gives him a "smile" (203), he is so delighted with this recognition that he tries to bribe her into giving him a steady supply of it:

> This hour has been an hour! Another smile?
> If you would sit thus by me every night
> I should work better, do you comprehend?
> I mean that I should earn more, give you more.
> (204-07)

Even when he realizes that she "smiled" to get his consent to her going out with her lover and to his painting "to pay" the "gaming debts" this "Cousin" owes, Andrea says, "Well, let smiles buy me!" (220-23). He is ready to spend the rest "of the evening" in "mus[ing] perfectly / How [he] could paint, were [he] but back in France, / One picture, just one more" not with Lucrezia as his model, but with her "at [his] side / To hear them--that is, Michel Agnolo-- / Judge all [he] do[es] and tell [Lucrezia] of its worth" (227-33). The dogged

persistence of Andrea's pursuit of the looks and smiles and appreciation of others, especially his faithless wife, betokens a need for confirmation so compulsive that he allows himself to be cuckolded in order to get even a few moments of recognition and, as Lucrezia impatiently waits to leave him alone, plans to "muse perfectly" (228) about a scene combining all his fantasies of confirmation.

Mr. Sludge is as acutely sensitive to and covetous of others' gazes and attention--as preoccupied with reception--as the other performative selves we have examined. More than they, however, he seems to understand his disappointment with the recognition he has gotten relative to the limitless recognition he needs; and more fully than the others he displays the sources and effects of this need in his psychic structure. Like Fifine, "Mr. Sludge" rewards detailed examination by yielding up new possibilities of interrelationships among our data on the monologuists.

Sludge's sensitivity to audiences, often marked by now-familiar references to faces, smiles, and eyes, is evident from the beginning in Sludge's careful monitoring of the face of his listener-patron, Hiram H. Horsefall, who has just caught Sludge cheating to produce a spirit-manifestation. Having gauged the depth of trouble he is in by Horsefall's "terrible face" (11), he estimates the effectiveness of his explanatory reminder of the "undeveloped spirit" that has "a grudge" against him (31-32) by noting how Horsefall's "face clears!" (40). Through just such alertness to audience response Sludge has risen from being "a help's son in [Horsefall's] house" (98) to being "a 'medium'" who "holds the circle" at seances and "rules the roast" (178-

81) at "sympathetic sideboards" (79). First eavesdropping to find out about the interest in spiritualism among the Horsefall family and their friends, he began by telling them he "'saw a ghost!'" (138); then, with the help of their clues as to what they expected might happen next and with the aid of books and overheard conversations that supplied him with information he "'could not' know" (499), he developed more and more of his mysterious powers.

As confirmation of his growing skill in performing, Sludge soon "found [him]self" "dining daintily, dizened smart, / Set on a stool buttressed by ladies' knees, / Every soft smiler calling [him] her pet" (268-71), being given "a course of treats" (293), and being "nursed" into telling more lies (404-05). His positive response to this attention has been qualified, however, by his audience's assumptions, first, that he is Horsefall's "'medium'"--an extension of Horsefall (350-52)--and second, that he is "a showman's ape" rather than a "man" (600, 603), an inferior who could not be cheating because he would not be intelligent enough to do so. Sludge is thus ambivalent about the gazes, approval, and praise he receives from his patronizing watchers, for the recognition he dreams of would come from idolizing watchers:

> . . . when I'd amuse myself,
> I shut my eyes and fancy in my brain
> I'm--now the President, now Jenny Lind,
> Now Emerson, now the Benicia Boy--
> With all the civilized world a-wondering
> And worshipping. (1266-71)

Sludge knows that his actual experiences of recognition must always be disappointing in comparison to this fantasy of limitless recognition.

Sludge's way of expressing and explaining his disappointment points toward the genesis and dynamics of his need for unqualified

confirmation. He describes himself as being "cockered, cosseted / And coddled" by an audience he likens to the adult women in a family: he is "Bidden enjoy their bullying," to which he reacts like "a fractious child"; he is "dandled soft by nurse, aunt, grandmother," but not allowed "Good fun and wholesome mud" for "Making dirt-pies"; and he is "enjoined be sweet, / And comely and superior" when he would rather be "laughing free, speaking plain, / And calling granny the gray old cat she is" (387-99). Seeing his position as that of a child both nurtured and thwarted by caregiving women, the price of whose praise is self-limitation and conformity to their expectations, Sludge associates bitter disappointment with his current audience and disappointment with his (and everyone else's) prototypical audience--the missing woman in his series "nurse, aunt, grandmother" (392).

Mothers are not missing from the monologue, however, and his anti-sentimental attitude toward them reveals both resentment of mothers and contempt for children who worship them. Throughout his speech, he tries to manipulate Horsefall by invoking Horsefall's "sainted mother" (1144) in a tone of mock reverence that evidently parodies what he sees as his patron's slavish attachment to his mother. Sludge has tried to prove to himself the foolishness of this attachment by using messages from the dead mother to flim-flam the living son. Similarly, the medium has mocked mother love by producing manifestations of a dead child and proving to himself that a completely phony "voice" and "tiny hand" (473-74) would evoke the same sentimentality that the real child would. In Sludge's mind, his successfully substituting a few tricks for the presence of a child's mother or a mother's child indicates that

the relationships involved were shallow, resting on false, conventional feelings so little connected to the other's particular way of being that a medium who never even knew the dead loved one could push a few all-purpose mother-child buttons and establish a relationship just about as meaningful as the original one.

In a terrifying moment, we glimpse the underpinnings of Sludge's cynicism: his nagging sense of the loving mother's underlying hostility and immense power; of the happy child's repressed terror and compensatory overconfidence in his or her power and his or her world; and of his own adult beliefs and expectations, like the child's, as superstitious substitutes for something that will never be available to him, genuine and reliable affirmation of his being:

> Your sainted mother, sir,--used you to live
> With such a thought as this a-worrying you?
> "She has it in her power to throttle me,
> "Or stab or poison: she may turn me out,
> "Or lock me in,--nor stop at this to-day,
> "But cut me off to-morrow from the estate
> "I look for"--(long may you enjoy it, sir!)
> "In brief, she may unchild the child I am."
> You never had such crotchets? Nor have I!
> Who, frank confessing childship from the first,
> Cannot both fear and take my ease at once,
> So, don't fear. . . . (1144-55)

The "child-like" defense against "fear" like this is to assume that destruction cannot touch "the son and heir / O' the kingdom" and to "expect" instead the "homage" that "is a son's plain right" (1154-64). The son conquers fear of the powerful (m)other by glorifying and empowering himself in his own mind.

Still a son with fears to suppress and imagined powers to prove, Sludge obscurely longs for someone to fulfill the myth of motherhood for him. This longing is expressed in his continuing search "for

signs" (1162) that the world affirms his comforting view of himself, and he finds them in "the pure obvious supernatural" (1166): his "presentiments," his prophetic "dreams," and his other paranormal "gift[s]" (1168-79). Thus he tries to cast the world as his all-approving parent, yet still wonders, "am I heir or not heir?" (1186). He suspects that "such tricks" as his fantasies of universal acclaim "sap, honeycomb the soul," but he admits he cannot "cure [him]self" (1272-73) of the need that fuels the fantasies. Toward the end of his speech, in fact, it becomes evident that he has been half-hoping not merely to persuade Horsefall not to expose him, but to gain from his patron the abundant "praise" (1442, 1454, 1463) accorded to literary artists whose "'wonderful . . . gift'" (1468) for "lying" (1435) wins them admiration for their "'creativeness and godlike craft'" (1469). For his fictional "piece," he complains, he gets "eight fingers and two thumbs" trying to strangle him (1470, 1476).

The old, repressed fear of the mother's "'power to throttle . . . / 'Or . . . poison'" him (1146-47) thus merges with what has just happened to Sludge, and, as his earlier self-analysis would predict, he separates himself from his fear, this time through his plan to take revenge on his attacker by spreading the "story" that Horsefall "throttled" his "sainted mother," "Or else . . . poisoned her!" (1505-06, 1511). Thus Sludge-as-unappreciated-child will overcome his fear of Horsefall-as-terrifying-parent by showing himself to be more powerful than the parent figure. He will accomplish this by making Horsefall guilty, in others' eyes, of killing his mother, a tactic that may also cause others to confirm Sludge. Thus, as he plans to "Begin

elsewhere anew!" (1522), it is clear that much as he wishes for "liberty" (1524), his performances will always bring him up against the limits set not by his audiences, but by his own need for their approval, which will never be adequate either to fulfill his dreams or to demolish his fear of a menacing (m)other-world that may yet "'unchild'" him (1151) by withdrawing all response.

The uncovering of the radical connection Sludge makes between audience response and the very continuation of existence, a connection so close that it is almost an identification, will allow us to link "'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came'" with the psychological phenomena we have explored so far. The need to have one's performances seen and confirmed in order to feel that one exists is extreme in Childe Roland, whose dependence on others' watching presence is so great that he cannot feel certain he is really acting (if only "to fail" [41]), indeed cannot even feel certain he is capable of acting (is "fit" to "fail" [41-42]), unless he is being seen. A character who for us hovers between mimesis and metaphor, the knight exemplifies in his experience of himself the predicament of the performative self that must have others' validation in order to seem real even to itself.

The most obvious manifestation of Roland's ontological dependence on others, his seemingly paranoid way of reading the world, is a mode of searching for an audience, without which he cannot enact an "end" (18) to his quest for the Dark Tower. The face of the "hoary cripple," whose "malicious eye" is turned "Askance to watch the working of his lie / On" his "victim" (2-6), seems to threaten Roland's life, but the cripple's looking at and exchanging looks and words with the knight

actually reassure the latter that he can perhaps fail now, thus performing as the cripple and other prophetic observers expect him to. However, once the cripple and "the safe road" (52), where other "travellers" (9) might be, are out of sight and the sun has "shot one grim / Red leer to see" Roland move onto "the plain" (47-48), nothing is left that sees him. Now the knight obsessively begins to look at and interpret the landscape, trying to find or make something in it that can look back at him. The plain has a "grimace" (61), implying a face; the "thistle-stalk[s]" have "head[s]," but if one grows up "Above its mates" (67-68), where it could see over them, "the head" is "chopped" off (68). There is a "horse," but it is "blind," and though "his every bone [is] a-stare," he has "shut eyes," and Roland "hate[s]" him (76-83).

Roland's fantasies make clear that his primary need is for someone to see him and confirm his existence. Looking into his "heart" in hopes of seeing there "earlier, happier sights" (85-87), he seeks others to help him "fitly . . . play [his] part" (88). He imagines "Cuthbert's . . . face" looking at him and, he says, Cuthbert "fold[ing] / An arm in mine to fix me to the place, / That way he used" to do (91-95). He imagines Giles, and "there he stands / Frank as ten years ago when knighted first" (97-98). To see someone face to face; to stand, to see someone else stand, to have someone see him stand; to have someone take hold of him and "fix" him "to the place" he is, so that he knows he is really <u>there</u>: these are the things Roland now needs and searches for in his memories. The memories dissolve, however, into images of losing all confirmation in "one night's

disgrace" (95), as Cuthbert did, or of being hanged as a "traitor, spit upon and curst" (102), as Giles was. Roland's attempt to confirm himself through internalized past experiences is worse than useless.

Focusing again on the "darkening path" in "this present," the knight seeks any life that might be there to verify his precarious being. "Will the night send a howlet or a bat?" (103-06), he wonders; such creatures could see him in the dark. Coming to "A sudden little river" (109), he continues to look for something to look at him, to confirm his being, or at least to mirror him as if it were in some relationship to him. He sees the "alders kneel[ing]" on the riverbanks and the "suicidal throng" of "willows" throwing "them[selves] headlong" into "The river which ha[s] done them all the wrong" but is "deterred no whit" by their "mute despair" (116-20). The trees, as uncaring toward him as the river is toward them in their desperation, suggest by their posture a parallel with Narcissus kneeling and looking into the mirroring pool, like the alders, and eventually being drawn into it, like the willows; but the river is indifferent to their need for reflection--does "them all the wrong" by "froth[ing] by" (119, 112), "its black eddy" (114) in the waning light offering not even the solace Narcissus found in seeing his own face look back at him. Roland's terror that he will "set [his] foot upon a dead man's cheek" or get his "spear" "tangled in" the corpse's "hair or beard" (122-24) seems to involve both his frustrated search for a watcher (like the blind horse, the dead man once could see, but now cannot) and his association of suicide with the death of a sense of self in the absence of mirroring (the corpse has done what the willows are about to do).

The same absence of audience continues beyond the river. The knight reads the next segment of the landscape as a deserted battleground: an "engine" with "rusty teeth of steel" is an instrument of torture "fit to reel / Men's bodies out like silk" (140-44); "a bit of stubbed ground" has been ruined by the whim of "a fool" who "Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood / Changes and off he goes!" (145-49). In this landscape, even the ratification of being that was once available from being given pain has departed. The "distorted mouth" of a "palsied oak" "Gaping at death" (154-56) is silent--the "hateful cripple" (2) at least spoke--and, Roland says, there is "nought / To point my footstep further!" (158-59). Without an other, an audience to act for and in relation to, he cannot act, cannot direct himself; yet still there is his desire "that some end might be" (18).

Thus, lacking stimulus to perform but desiring to do so, Roland is ready to react to any sign of recognition the world might provide. So he reacts to "A great black bird" that "Sails past," "brush[ing]" Roland's "cap" with "his wide wing": this living creature is "perchance the guide" he has "sought" (160-62). The strength of his wish, I take it, intensifies his interpretive search for watchers to the point that he projects a landscape of witnesses surrounding him and "the Tower," which is "blind" (181). Mountains loom up, "surpris[ing]" him (167) with their Wordsworthian surveillance, as the sun's eye returns to focus on him "through a cleft" in "The hills," which lie "like giants at a hunting, . . . / Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay . . ." (188-91). Once again he hears--this time as if they were "tolled" (told) externally--the "Names . . . / Of all the lost

adventurers [his] peers" (193-95); and then he sees them "in a sheet of flame," "ranged along the hill-sides, met / To view the last of [him], a living frame / For one more picture!" (199-201). Now Roland can perform: "Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set, / And blew. '<u>Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came</u>'" (203-04).

"Childe Roland," as several critics have argued, may not be generically a true dramatic monologue (see for example Rader, "Dramatic" 140-41); however, Childe Roland is psychologically a typical Browning monologuist, a monologuist in search of an audience. He is a performer in search of a gazer, a personality which, requiring confirmation even to make failure seem real, quests for and if necessary hallucinates witnesses, if only to confirm defeat. The case of Roland goes beyond supporting Melchiori's observation that "Over and over again in Browning's poetry the knight or artist, at the moment of his trial, is surrounded by 'watchers'" (124); such a figure <u>must</u> have watchers if (s)he is to feel tried.

Erickson remarks that <u>The Ring and the Book</u> defines "human relationships" in terms of standing "trial before everyone else" (231), an observation easily generalized to most of the monologuists--not, however, because this is the poet's theme, but because he creates characters whose need for this situation of trial, at least before <u>some</u>one else, would drive them, in a predicament like Roland's, to create as he does "a living frame / For one more picture . . ." (200-01). The word "frame" suggests the proscenium arch of a traditional stage or the natural amphitheater formed by the poem's landscape; but its being alive connects the frame to a context of viewers within which

Roland can feel himself to be real, as he challenges the intolerably "blind" Dark Tower, because he is making himself into "one more picture" (201) or tableau, the title of which is, of course, "'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came.'"

A Berkelian by psychological disposition, Roland feels that in the wilderness he risks the fate of a tree which, falling with no one there to see or hear its fall, will not really have fallen. He aspires to and in the end achieves, to his own satisfaction at least, the condition of the dramatic monologuist so as to cope with the ontological dependence on others that creates his anxiety of solipsism; and in all of this he exemplifies the subtle interaction, so typical of Browning's speakers, between the sense of self as a performer and the sense of others as gazers, between exhibitionism and the need for confirmation. Each would prefer, of course, to be "encircle[d] . . . with praise and love," as the poet-speaker of "Pauline" puts it (525); each seeks "confirmation and approval," as Festus sees Paracelsus doing (5.530); but in a pinch, to be seen and noticed will do, for that is preferable to the nagging sense of marginal existence, of deficient being, that haunts such a person alone on a "gray plain" ("'Childe Roland'" 52) with night coming on.

III

The Browning monologuists' ontological dependence on others, manifested in their performative stance toward the world and in their propensity for seeking confirmation of their sense of themselves, is accompanied by their tendency to experience and even to seek merger of the self with the other. We can understand why they often experience

their self-other relationships as interminglings of being by considering the performer-audience dynamic as an exchange of being in which the speakers perform some version of their being, thus externalizing and transferring some of it to or toward the audience, and receive in return the "confirmation and approval" (Paracelsus 5.530), or at least attention and recognition, that bolster their feeling of reality and identity. They seek this boundary-penetrating exchange as a way of completing and giving definition to their deficient selves (cf. Armstrong, "Browning and Victorian Poetry" 286).

Several critics have noticed this search as it occurs among Browning's male speakers. U. C. Knoepflmacher uses the notion of the "female epipsyche" or "complement"--a not-quite-separate figure--to describe the audience such a speaker seeks to "restore an incomplete male self" (141-42). As a consequence of the need "to control" the woman who might or does supply this completion, the male may try to deprive her of "autonomy" by casting her in, or perhaps forcing her to play, a "role" that suits his needs (Armstrong, "Browning and Victorian Poetry" 287, 285; cf. Posnock 7); he may "flatten" her "into . . . a 'fixed' and immoveable" image that "reduces" her to "nothingness" (Knoepflmacher 142-43); or he may idealize her and submerge himself in her, thus attempting to assure a supply of her being.

Beyond seeking self-completion in merger with another, Browning monologuists frequently seek merger with reality by "project[ing]" themselves "onto all they contemplate" (Hassett 70; cf. Tucker, Browning's Beginnings 147) and by trying "to subsume the world into their web of understanding" (Slinn x). This reduction of the

difference between the outside world and the self reduces their anxiety (cf. Slinn 101) and allows them both to feel confirmed by a reality that is in agreement with their viewpoint and to merge with some or all of their surroundings--another way of filling their need for more being than they feel they have. It is particularly common for the speakers to enter into or take in their prized possessions and productions, merging with these material objects as extensions of their own being--a psychological habit that can backfire, however, if their material objects do not seem to them (or worse yet, do not seem to other people) to be worthy of confirmation.

The typical monologuist's sense of personal being is thus amorphous and mobile, easily absorbed by or absorbing the other and the outside world (cf. J. Hillis Miller 81-82; Armstrong, "Browning and Victorian Poetry" 285). These two potential modes of relationship might coexist in some kind of "comfortable and cozy" balance, as J. Hillis Miller has suggested (136-37), and Martin's notion of the "'cybernetic' self" (158) seems to envision a similar possibility. As Armstrong points out, however, the monologuist's "fusion of self and externality" seldom results in a "meaningful relationship" ("Browning and Victorian Poetry" 285-86), for that would require the monologuist to feel both the self and the other as separate centers of being. Instead, Browning monologuists tend to be absorbed by another's being; to absorb another's being or segments of the outside world into their own being, thus making the other or parts of outer reality into extensions of themselves; or in some cases, to swing back and forth between the two extreme positions.

As Armstrong has noted, these positions are described in Sordello (1840), there in particular relation to poets ("Browning and Victorian Poetry" 285). Those dominated by the impulse to be absorbed have "A need to blend with," even "Bury themselves . . . / In something not themselves; they would belong / To what they worship" (Sordello 1.507-10). Those dominated by the impulse to absorb "eagerly" appropriate "each new revealment" in others and the rest of the external world and regard it as "a twin / With a distinctest consciousness within," so that they are always attributing "the quality, now first / Revealed, to their own soul" (1.523-28). In this group, "homage, other souls direct / Without, turns inward" (1.535-36) as the self gains "mastery" (1.565) over everything by absorbing it. The first group have been likened to Keats's "'chameleon' poets" (Ball 2) whose "sympathetic imagination" (J. Hillis Miller 106) makes them "negatively capable" (Ryals 248); the second group have been seen as living in the mode of the "'egotistical sublime'" (Ball 2), "always glorifying" their "own self-activity," which "aims to embrace and absorb everything" (Ryals 28, 247). These analogies imply, I think, not that Browning has made his monologuists poets by subsuming them under a theory of the poetic character, but that the qualities defining absorbees and absorbers represent psychological intuitions so basic as to underlie both his conception of a poet's psychodynamics and his mimetic representation of many of his speakers.

Certainly the tendency to experience and at times to seek states of merged being may be observed in a number of the monologuists. In "Porphyria's Lover," for example, the ironic vulnerabilities of a

personality prone to such states are revealed. Alone in the beginning and not expecting Porphyria's arrival, the lover has read his environment as Childe Roland does, in terms of an other to notice, if not to replenish, his depleted self. Like Roland, too, he projects his beliefs about his situation into the world and then finds there evidence that his beliefs about the world are true: it is a hostile, "sullen" other, full of "spite" and a will "to vex" him rather than to comfort him with what he needs (1-5). Having made the gloom and destructiveness of a storm into something that he must take personally because he has unconsciously made it personal, the lover feels threatened by the image of the world that he has created in the image of his anxieties about the world; he is scaring himself to death.

When Porphyria comes, she moves between him and the fearsome world which has almost taken him over, "shut[ting] the cold out and the storm," and creates a "warm," cozy world by building a fire (7-9). Finding her lover silent and unresponsive, she physically invites him to merge with her, drawing his "arm about her waist" and his "cheek" to "her smooth white shoulder" "And spread[ing], o'er all, her yellow hair" (16-20) as a second barrier between the lover and the outside world. As long as he has her, his world will be unthreatening and secure. But her words send him a dissonant message: she will not "give herself to [him] forever"; her "passion" for him will only "sometimes . . . prevail," when she has "A sudden thought of one so pale / For love of her, and all in vain" (25-29). From his merger with Porphyria in the present, the speaker takes in her being, which is conveyed to him by what he takes to be her "worshipp[ing]" him (33),

and his sense of his own being is replenished, a state which he describes as feeling his "heart swell" (34). Her intention to leave him again now endangers his positive sense of himself, but this time--because of her confirmation, ironically enough--he is sufficiently strengthened to find "A thing to do" (37-38): to act in hopes of maintaining the performer-approving audience relationship which he feels he will have as long as Porphyria looks up at him--breathlessly.

Having scared himself to Porphyria's death, her lover can absorb her into "his own mental processes," escaping his fear of her "inconstancy" (Knoepflmacher 151). He has not "love[d] Porphyria to death because he so loves himself" (Tucker, "From Monomania" 124; cf. Knoepflmacher 154), but because he cannot even feel quite alive, let alone love himself, without Porphyria. Nor has he killed her primarily because he feels "impotent" in relation to her (Knoepflmacher 142) and wishes her to be "passive" while he "assume[s] the normal masculine role" (King, Focusing Artifice 71-72), though there are definitely sexual overtones to the lover's act. His eagerness to believe that "No pain felt she; / I am quite sure she felt no pain" (41-42) militates against a reading of his act as that of a sadistic master who aims "to gratify the self . . . by killing the other (the slave) and reducing it to nothingness" (Erickson 157; cf. Blackburn 57); indeed, the lover's attempt to think of the dead woman as "Laugh[ing]," "Blush[ing]," and feeling "glad" to have "gained" what she wanted (45, 48, 53) indicates his need to think of her not with "unfeeling hardness" (Blackburn 58), but with a terrifyingly deluded tenderness. His need for "total possession" of her does make her "otherness and individuality . . . a

threat" to him (Blackburn 58; cf. Armstrong, "Browning and Victorian Poetry" 287); but both his desire to possess Porphyria and his anxiety about her "independen[ce]" (Armstrong, "Browning and Victorian Poetry" 287) stem not from a need to destroy her, but from a desperate need to preserve her presence, to keep himself going by means of the confirmation she gives his fragile sense of identity.

The Duke of "My Last Duchess" comes far closer than Porphyria's lover does to being the sadistic master whose "fantasy of total power" (Armstrong, "Browning and Victorian Poetry" 287) over a slave-wife has ultimately led to "a species of necrophilia" (Blackburn 58). However, this relationship is just one part of a larger pattern of thought and behavior, the key to which is the Duke's attempt to absorb everyone and everything around him into himself, to make his world an extension of him. The Duchess was supposed to be merged into his being, to know what he wanted without being "lessoned" (40) about it and in general to have no "will" (36) separate from his. Similarly, as Shaw has noted, the Duke expects the envoy to be "another stage property" (102): he is to be turned into the Duke's tool, with which he will manipulate the count and as several critics have argued, perhaps his daughter, the prospective duchess, as well.

The Duke not only regards other people as self-extensions; he also extends himself through his name, which to him is far more than a designation for himself. In his mind, too, displaying his possessions is displaying himself: his statue of "Neptune . . . / Taming a seahorse, . . . / Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me" (54-56) is an "image" of himself as the "masterful potentate" that he tries

to be by absorbing all the being in reach (Tucker, Browning's Beginnings 180). Clearly the Duchess has shaken that image not simply by failing to give the Duke all her attention, but also by introducing into his world a being that he could not consume. Even "flatten[ed]" into a picture (Knoepflmacher 142), she continues to "frustrat[e]" his need "for godlike, repressive power" (Tucker, Browning's Beginnings 180), for the portrait--which stands in for the exclusively adulatory gazer he wanted the Duchess to be and which extends into the world his image of himself-as-owner-of-the-best--preserves her evasiveness, too.

Browning's bishops are similar to the Duke in their impulse to extend themselves beyond their personal boundaries by merging with possessions that supplement their sense of their greatness. The bishop who orders his tomb has had to relinquish his prized mistress, since "she is dead" (6), but he still relishes the memory of her and of Gandolf's envy of him for possessing her. His villas, especially his "brave Frascati villa with its bath" (45-46), are the tool through which he hopes, though faintly, to extend his will beyond death to control his sons' erection of his tomb: "All lapis, all, sons! Else I give the Pope / My villas!" (102-03). His preoccupation, though, is an audacious project for the future: to beat death by merging with his magnificent tomb. He is well prepared to attempt this move: his descriptions of things in human terms (his hidden "lump . . . of lapis lazuli" is "Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape, / Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast" [43-44]) and his descriptions of human beings in material terms (he promises to pray for his sons to have "mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs" [75]) indicate how easily

his thinking travels a two-way street between the non-human and the human, so that a stone becomes flesh and flesh stone: Gandolf's stone effigy is still Gandolf lying on "his tomb-top" (67) seeing, envying, or laughing; and the bishop's effigy will be the same, still able to "hear," "see," "feel," and "taste" (81-83) what the church environment has to offer. Lying on his bed, he thinks of himself as entering that life:

> . . . as I lie here, hours of the dead night,
> Dying in state by such slow degrees,
> I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
> And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,
> And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop
> Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work. . . .
> (85-89)

His defense against death is shaken by his suspicion that his sons will not build the sort of tomb he wants: for him to think of their using "Gritstone, a-crumble!" is to feel that they "have stabbed [him] with ingratitude / To death . . ." (114-16). Yet his fantasy of survival-in-stone is saved as he directs his sons' departure into the form of the liturgical processions that will pass by his effigy, for this parallel action perfects his conflation of his present state, lying on his bed being the image of the stone image he is to be in the future, and his imagined future state, lying on his slab being the image of the fleshly image he was in the past. In an ironic reversal of the approved Biblical transformations of "the stony heart" into "an heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11: 19) and of "the letter" "written . . . in tables of stone" into "the spirit" "written . . . in fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Corinthians 3: 3, 6), the bishop anticipates the transformation of his heart of flesh into a heart of stone and of his

living words into the "picked phrase" of his "epitaph" in "marble's language, Latin" (76-77, 98).

Bishop Blougram's desire for the right stone to extend his greatness worldward--or for the right pile of stones, to be exact--immediately establishes his kinship with his more openly grasping counterpart of an earlier period as he moves toward a direct confrontation with Gigadibs's contempt for him:

> We ought to have our Abbey back, you see.
> It's different, preaching in basilicas,
> And doing duty in some masterpiece
> Like this of brother Pugin's, bless his heart!
> I doubt if they're half baked, those chalk rosettes,
> Ciphers and stucco-twiddlings everywhere. . . . (3-8)

A real Gothic cathedral would better strengthen the bishop's sense of himself for the encounter with Gigadibs than does his new Gothic revival church, but he thrusts other possessions of his toward the listening journalist as though they could literally outweigh Gigadibs's negative opinion of his host: there are the bishop's "claret"(535)--two "jug[s]" of it on "ice" (132-33); his "arm-chair" at the dinner table (24); and all "the good things" (274) that Shakespeare himself wished for but did not attain: "the Vatican, / Greek busts, Venetian paintings, Roman walls, / And English books," "Terni's fall, Naples' bay and Gothard's top" (529-33).

Yet, though he is "worldly in this world" (797), expanding his being into its "creature-comforts" (766), Bishop Blougram is far from the confounding of himself almost exclusively with things that characterizes his Renaissance counterpart. Blougram is flourishing his possessions before Gigadibs, along with his "bishopric, / . . . daily bread, . . . influence, and state" (903-04), in part simply to prove

that what he has includes whatever secular "perfection" or "ideal" Gigadibs is capable of conceiving (434). Unlike the earlier bishop, Blougram is at times drawn toward another version of merger, merger with "a master" (844):

> . . . I . . .
> . . . want, am made for, and must have a God
> Ere I can be aught, do aught . . . no mere name
> Want, but the true thing with what proves its truth,
> To wit, a relation from that thing to me,
> Touching from head to foot--which touch I feel. . . .
> (845-50)

Blougram's statement of his need for God suggests that in him, the common tendency of the monologuists to imbibe a sense of being from merger with an other has been transmuted into the form of (I think phenomenologically genuine) religious experience. The same basic need for merger accounts for his expansion into his things; his "car[ing] to rule / The masses" (766-67) by extending his being to include them; and his feeling of God's "Touching" him. This observation suggests that the usual view of Blougram as a religious hypocrite--his interest in material, worldly matters taken to be genuine, his interest in spiritual matters, not--fails to grasp the underlying psychological need from which his seemingly inconsistent interests arise.

In "Cleon," the speaker-as-letter-writer exhibits strong impulses toward merger, impulses mediated, however, by things he has worked to produce rather than by mere acquisitions. His evident pleasure that his accomplishments have extended his being far into the world and his somewhat more muted satisfaction that through these achievements his being is subsumed into a larger whole result from relatively constructive transformations of the need to supplement his own being.

His successful self-extension is receiving considerable confirmation as he begins his reply to the inquiries of another aging great man, King Protus, whom he congratulates for having sent him "Gift after gift" (8): "in such an act / Of love for him whose song gives life its joy," Cleon assures Protus, everyone will see the king's "recognition of the use of life" (20-22). Thus Cleon, assuming that the king is like him in needing to be seen and confirmed by others, rewards his benefactor--first by commenting on the recognition Protus will get for having properly valued him, then by "promis[ing]" the king "To pour libation" to him while "looking o'er the sea" in the king's direction and "Making this slave" (a beautiful woman from the king's ship) "narrate thy fortunes, speak / Thy great words, and describe thy royal face" (37-40).

Now that he has imagined himself and the king into a mediated version of the performer-gazer relationship, he draws further satisfaction from confirming for Protus that "It is as thou hast heard: in one short life / I, Cleon, have effected all those things / Thou wonderingly dost enumerate" (44-46). As he exhibitionistically re-enumerates them, his interest in the power of his work to enter others' being--to put his "soul . . . in men's hearts" (162)--is obvious:

> That epos on thy hundred plates of gold
> Is mine,--and also mine the little chant,
> So sure to rise from every fishing-bark
> When, lights at prow, the seamen haul their net.
> The image of the sun-god on the phare,
> Men turn from the sun's self to see, is mine;
> The Poecile, o'er-storied its whole length,
> As thou didst hear, with painting, is mine too.
> I know the true proportions of a man
> And woman also, not observed before;
> And I have written three books on the soul,
> Proving absurd all written hitherto,

> And putting us to ignorance again.
> For music,--why, I have combined the moods,
> Inventing one. In brief, all arts are mine;
> Thus much the people know and recognize,
> Throughout our seventeen islands. (47-63)

Tremendous adulation and widespread influence fulfill Cleon's need for merger via continual ontological expansion.

At the same time, Cleon feels (and intellectualizes) the other aspect of his merger impulses--that is, his need to perfect his being by entering a larger being--as he explains his success in historical terms, as the result of the "greater mind / . . . since more composite" that has developed in "these latter days" (64-65). His accomplishments contribute to "a great whole" (77) that ultimately emerges from the "progress" of "Mankind, made up of all the single men,-- / In such a synthesis the labor ends" (92-94). In a similar vein, he expresses his satisfaction with his "composite" (65) greatness, which comes from his "hav[ing] entered into sympathy / With" the great artists of the past, "running these into one soul" (143-44). Here Cleon presents himself as a microcosm of and a "part having reference to all" (78) within the "synthesis" (94) toward which history is aiming. Thus he balances his impulses to swallow up all and to be swallowed up by all and expresses both his sense of his unique, once-in-history greatness ("I stand myself" [151]) and his sense of having a permanent role in the teleological sweep of all-in-history.

Unlike the merger phenomena in such a personality as that of the dying bishop, however, Cleon's experiences of merger do not defend him by deluding him. The king has asked whether Cleon "fear[s] death less than" he does, given that the artist's "'life stays in the poems men

shall sing, / 'The pictures men shall study'" (167-71), and his other "living works" (276). The artist-philosopher rebukes Protus for his confusion of "knowing how / And showing how to live (my faculty) / With actually living" (281-83): if dead artists "live still," Cleon remarks, "let them come and take / Thy slave in my despite, drink from thy cup, / Speak in my place" (306-08). His "horror" at death (315) "at times" prompts Cleon to "imagine to [his] need" a "future state . . . / Unlimited in capability / For joy, as this is in desire for joy" (324-27); but he rejects this possibility as a fantasy despite his need for a defense against thoughts of the time

> When all my works wherein I prove my worth,
> Being present still to mock me in men's mouths,
> Alive still, in the praise of such as thou,
> I, I the feeling, thinking, acting man,
> The man who loved his life so over-much,
> Sleep in my urn. (318-23)

Cleon's comparatively well-controlled greed to draw in being from outside his personal boundaries emerges here in the form of a veiled fantasy that his "works" have taken his life away from him; indeed, the idea of his having been betrayed by his works, which have stolen being from him and then deserted him, is simply an exaggerated version of something he has said earlier: "Methinks I'm older that I bowed myself / The many years of pain that taught me art!" (289-90). The fantasy includes, too, a notion that others who "praise" his works have appropriated his being, have craftily made him "prove" his "worth" in order to devour it: his works are in others' "mouths," from whence they turn upon his depleted self to "mock" him. Thus for Cleon, as for monologuists whose merger experiences take a more extreme, even bizarre

form, the need to strengthen the self through absorption of or by the outside world leads to an ironic weakening of the sense of self.

This weakening is especially evident in Andrea del Sarto's quest for merger with the world and specifically with Lucrezia. Andrea's frequently noted tendency to read the outside world as an extension of himself (see for example J. Hillis Miller 136) or perhaps more accurately, to "us[e] his sympathies" to help him enter into his surroundings (Shaw 145-46) is evident as he describes the "common greyness" that "silvers everything" (35): "yonder sober pleasant Fiesole" with "autumn in everything" (40, 45); Lucrezia, whose "first pride in" him is now "in a twilight" (36-37); and himself, with his "work and self / And all that [he] was born to be and do, / A twilight-piece" (47-49). His images of enclosed worlds--"the garden" inside the "convent-wall across the way" (44, 42) and "the grange" with its "four walls" within which "the weak-eyed bat" (himself) ought to stay (169-71)--are, among other things, images of predictable environments which would allow him to submerge his being in them without interference from changes or novel events that would require him to separate himself from his surroundings in order to assess them.

Andrea's need to see his life in terms that accord with these images of safety accounts in part for his professions of faith in a God-predestined world: "Love, we are in God's hand" (49); "All is as God over-rules" (133); the year in France was wonderful, but "How could it end in any other way?" (171); "Let each one bear his lot" (252). When he can believe in God's control of his life, Andrea can feel that his present and future--troubling though they might seem from his

limited point of view--are <u>really</u> as reliable as God; to live under this conviction would allow him to be always as "peaceful as old age" (244), absorbed by his world which is in turn absorbed by God.

In part because instability disturbs this condition, a "quarrel" with Lucrezia (1) is unusually threatening to Andrea, who not only needs her confirmation, but also needs to preserve the quiet, routine environment in which he can lose himself. If she will not admire him, she might at least "let" him "sit" hand in hand with her while they "look a half-hour forth on Fiesole, / Both of one mind, . . . / Quietly, quietly the evening through . . ." (13-17); in fact, he would settle for her leaving him if she would "let" him "sit / The grey remainder of the evening out, / Idle," to "muse perfectly" (226-28). It is obvious that Andrea is not now looking for any exhortations of "'God and the glory!'" (128) from Lucrezia. He mainly wants her to look at, listen to, and agree with him (to be "of one mind" with him) and to blend into the setting so that he can get her confirmation without having to stir about too much, without having to separate his dispersed being from her and the environment and pull himself together. Andrea complains to her that "I often am much wearier than you think" (11), and it makes sense that he would be: his proneness to merge drains his being into the outside world so that he feels weak and depleted, "low-pulsed" (82), with "all the play, the insight and the stretch-- / Out of me, out of me!" (116-17).

IV

The merger experiences we have seen in many of Browning's speakers are often associated with an unboundaried feeling, an inflated

sense of perfected being, and a conviction of having extraordinary control over the external world. Such feelings inform their frequent preoccupation with being or becoming limitless, omnipotent, and invulnerable, a preoccupation that often underlies a monologuist's belief that (s)he is special, or is favored by fortune, or has magical powers. This kind of grandiose self-conception found in Browning's characters has been mentioned in a number of studies of his themes. J. Hillis Miller notes the "horror of limitation" often expressed in the poems (85), while William O. Raymond remarks on their interest in "the boundlessness of personality" (162) and "the infinite potentialities of the soul" (161; cf. Crowell 124). Less idealistically, Santayana refers to Browning's "persuasion that the soul is essentially omnipotent" (74), an outlook that Arthur Symons rightly connects with the typical character's tendency to feel that (s)he is the "centre of creation" (5).

Limitless themselves, or so they feel, the characters, as J. Hillis Miller says, "are seeking some limitless satisfaction" (139), often pursuing it with a "raw and infantile grasping" (Blackburn 44). This "seeking," "grasping" attitude is mirrored in the monologue form itself. The monologue's "tirade which we are to imagine as listened to but never answered" and its "dialogue of which we are only to hear one side" (Lubbock 48) reflect a fantasy of omnipotence in which the speaker's is the one, the all-commanding voice in the poem's universe. As Mermin shows, the genre is marked by a recurring "tendency to associate speech itself with power and aggression" (15) and to emphasize "the power implied by the speaker's very freedom to speak as

he does" (47). Speech thus appears in some cases as the medium through which the monologuist's feelings of omnipotence and invulnerability are not only expressed, but made operative in the outside world.

"Johannes Agricola in Meditation" represents a speaker wholly in the grip of such feelings, for which he finds a validating language in his theology. The limit-free Johannes can "look right through" the "gorgeous roof" of "heaven" and see God, no matter how many celestial bodies, too "dazzling" for ordinary people to see through, are shining in between (1-5, 9). Other people here on earth must see God "through a glass, darkly" until "that which is perfect is come," but Johannes already sees Him "face to face" (1 Corinthians 13: 10, 12) as He "smiles" (12)--no doubt because Johannes is already perfect. In the doctrine of election the speaker finds a language for his sense of supreme specialness, his conviction of his priority:

> Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,
> Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled
> The heavens, God thought on me his child;
> Ordained a life for me, arrayed
> Its circumstances every one
> To the minutest. . . . (13-18)

Johannes's self also seems to him invulnerable: "Guiltless for ever" (23) by predestination, he "must ascend" (31); his every "thought and word and deed" must "swell [God's] love for" him (26-27); he could commit "All hideous sins" knowing his "nature" would "convert" them to "gladness" (33-37) because he is magic. Looking down "on hell's fierce bed" (43), which he thinks he can see and judge as though he were God, Johannes feeds his already well-battened sense of invulnerability on the sight of the pious damned whose "striving turned to sin" (50) because they were not among the elect. Arrogantly

grateful to God for choosing him--Johannes can be arrogant because God's "love had need" of someone like him who would always "content" it (28-30)--the speaker "praise[s]" God because he cannot "understand" and hence "reckon on" that choice, cannot "bargain for his love, and stand, / Paying a price, at his right hand . . ." (56-60). If Johannes thought just anyone could get where he is by doing certain things, he would not enjoy his position nearly so much; it is far more satisfying to believe that he is where he is simply because he is who he is, for that belief better confirms his feeling of being inherently special and better validates his view of himself as God's favored child, the child who is not limited by any rules and who may do whatever he likes and still get limitless love.

Convictions of his own "godlike omnipotence" (Shaw 94) and invulnerability lie just the other side of speech in the Duke of "My Last Duchess," manifesting themselves, Langbaum suggests, as the speaker's "power and freedom, . . . his hard core of character fiercely loyal to itself" (83). More than any other monologue, the speech not only conveys the Duke's sense of possessing these qualities (cf. Mermin 47), but also demonstrates their efficacy within the world of the poem. "I call / That piece a wonder, now" (2-3), the Duke says of the portrait; and lo, it is "a wonder," for in his world the Duke, like Adam naming the animals in his, has sole power to name and define what is. Others may not so much as anticipate his prerogative to utter by questioning him, not even "Strangers like" the envoy who "read" the portrait without completely comprehending it: "they would ask" the Duke "How such a glance came there"--"if they durst" (6-12). But they

do not dare. The Duchess dared to define the painter's remarks as "courtesy," but the Duke's definition of them is the operative one: "stuff" (19-20). The Duchess's fault will be defined as the Duke defines it, a fact emphasized by his self-interruption with a question that only he can answer: "She had / A heart--how shall I say?--too soon made glad, / Too easily impressed . . ." (21-23).

In this context of the Duke's authority over meaning, his claim to lack "skill / In speech . . . to make [his] will / Quite clear to" the Duchess (35-37), combined with his statement that he would "Never . . . stoop" to such explaining anyway (43), is especially chilling. Having godlike power to make the rules under which others must live (or not), he can choose to make other guess them. The Duchess displeased him with her indiscriminate "smile"; "This grew; [he] gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together" (45-46). The Duke has made himself "Quite clear" (37): his thoughts, his will, and his words are omnipotent, his power is unlimited, and he is invulnerable, for no one can make any action of his have bad consequences for him. As he steers the envoy away from the portrait and toward "The company below" (48), who doubtless would not dare ask what happened to the last duchess, he concludes, as Slinn puts it, "an unchallenged performance which both creates and reinforces an ideal of the ego as monarch of all" (40). Though his monarchy has met resistance from the last duchess, it will not do to make too much of this temporary aberration; like Lucifer's fall, the Duchess's "trifling" (35) has simply given the Duke-as-God a chance to put forth his power in a most convincing way. Only his persistent memory of her failure to confirm his omnipotence while she

was alive troubles his grandiose self-conception at all, and he can meet that problem by keeping alive and exhibiting the memory of his eventual triumph.

Feelings of omnipotence and invulnerability, though moderated and relatively disguised, appear in Bishop Blougram's after-dinner apologetics aimed at a journalist who, like the envoy to the Duke, is both the auditor and the silently consenting proof of the bishop's claims of specialness and immunity. Attributing omnipotent fantasies to Gigadibs--"you would be all, / I would be merely much" (84-85)--Blougram acknowledges the limits imposed by "What may be" in life (90). Later, however, he covertly argues that the limits placed on him are considerably wider than other people's because of all sorts of exceedingly fortunate circumstances. He "happened to be born" a Catholic and was urged to be a priest "As best and readiest means of living by" (302-04); the Catholic "form of Christian faith" turned out to be the "most potent of all forms / For working on the world" (308-09); and he has mainly "let external forces work for" him (314) to get him his position:

> --Bid the street's stones be bread and they are bread;
> Bid Peter's creed, or rather, Hildebrand's,
> Exalt me o'er my fellows in the world
> An make my life an ease and joy and pride;
> It does so. . . . (315-19)

His position also allows him to "exercise" his "power . . . and will to dominate," traits which would "hurt" him if he could not use them effectively (322-23); at the same time his possessions and power do not make him feel "gross" (329) because he is supposed to have them: he "must take what men offer"; it is all "imposed on [him], no choice

of" his; and "thus life is best for" him (330-37). From the bishop's point of view, his life has been one lucky break after another: his birth into the right church with the right doctrine has put him into the right vocation that causes his world to give him the right things and the right status to make him happy and the right power to allow him to fulfill his need to rule; his right church has all the right traditions and symbols that allow him to feel that he has a right to all these right conditions. Altogether, the bishop's sense of leading a charmed life is very similar to Johannes Agricola's sense of being among the elect; both feel themselves to be very special.

Evidence of the bishop's grandiose self-conception is abundant. Everyone is intrigued by his faith because he is living in a period when it is interesting for "a superior man" to "believe" (410-11). That his belief is so fascinating is another piece of luck: "It's through my coming in the tail of time, / Nicking the minute with a happy tact" (412-13). Or again: a great man like Shakespeare "Could fancy he . . . had" all he wished for; but, says Blougram, "I wish and get" (541, 547). Despite all he has revealed to Gigadibs, the bishop feels so invulnerable to criticism that he does "not condescend to enjoin, beseech, / Hint secrecy on one of all these words!" (923-24); in fact he challenges Gigadibs just to try to publish an account of their conversation (961-66). He enjoys conferring upon his guest "three words," scribbled on one of his calling cards, which Gigadibs need only show in London, "in Dublin or New York" to command "Such terms as never [he] aspired to get / In all our own [Catholic] reviews and some not ours" (955-60). Gigadibs may wish, but Blougram wishes

and gets. Like the Duke, Bishop Blougram summons and exercises power through words: liturgies, sermons, audiences for the privileged, reviews, and table talk are his instruments; and his name, like the Duke's, can command obedience.

Unlike the Duke, however, the bishop recognizes that reality limits even him and acknowledges that his invulnerability to his auditor is to a significant degree a function of Gigadibs's lower social rank and lesser power. More than the Duke, Blougram generally appears to have adjusted his grandiosity to take account of what is possible. These apparent contrasts must not be overemphasized, however. It suits the Duke's needs to overlook the envoy's inferior position: the Duchess, not the envoy, has offended the Duke by presumption; and even (perhaps especially) if the Duke is using the speech to send a message to his prospective duchess and her father, he is using it mainly to assert, and thus to feel, a restored certainty of his invulnerability--a certainty that will be increased if he downplays the envoy's inability to test a duke's power.

Blougram, on the other hand, is using his speech to deal directly with the man who has offended him by despising him, and to emphasize his auditor's lower standing and lesser power suits his need to "kill" the offender by placing him in a position where his words, which represent for a writer such potency as he has, will be rendered impotent if he turns them against the bishop by simply repeating the bishop's words; but they will be accepted and paid for if he uses the bishop's name and the card with "three words" to place anything <u>except</u> the biggest story he has ever had. The Duke knows how to have someone

killed; the bishop knows how to emasculate a would-be revisionist critic at the dinner table and place him in a no-win situation so frustrating that he gives up writing and emigrates to Australia to till the soil and read his Bible (1012-14). Altogether, the contrast between the Duke's and the bishop's adjustment to the possible may be less stark than it appears. Their contrasting methods--the Duke's crude order to eliminate the source of his problem versus the bishop's subtle creation of a psychological no-exit--are equally well attuned to their respective times, places, and positions. Neither one's reach exceeds either his grasp or the prevailing moral code for people of his sort, and neither seems to be overwhelmed by a disparity between what he wishes and what he gets.

Such is not the case for Cleon, whose introspective "mus[ings] / Upon the scheme of earth and man in chief" (182-83) have made him acutely conscious of that disparity. Despite his belief that his abilities are a "gift" of "the gods" and not conferred "by chance" (152, 154)--his belief in his specialness--Cleon sees the "gift" as a curse in disguise, for it confronts him with the inadequacy of humankind's "natural" being to the desires of the conscious "soul" (232-33). Knowledge has raised human beings to a vantage point or "tower" (235) from which

> . . . we have discovered . . .
> . . . . . .
> That there's a world of capability
> For joy, spread round about us, meant for us,
> Inviting us; and still the soul craves all,
> And still the flesh replies, "Take no jot more
> "Than ere thou clombst the tower to look abroad!
> "Nay, so much less as that fatigue has brought
> "Deduction to it." (237-45)

Because our "physical recipiency" is "bounded," our "life's inadequate to joy, / As the soul sees joy" (246-50); "a man can use but a man's joy / While he sees God's" (261-62); one "seest the wider but to sigh the more," so "Most progress is most failure. . ." (271-72).

Though Cleon is at this point playing the philosopher's role for the king, there is reason to believe that his generalizations about human life, like Johannes Agricola's theology, express his psychological state: that the soul which rises so high and "craves all" is his own; that the flesh which cannot take as much joy as it desires is his body; that the "world of capability / For joy . . . meant for us" is the world meant for him; that the "bounded physical recipiency" he refers to is his own; that the man who "sees God's" joy and who feels that his achievements unfairly make him able to suffer more from his physical limitations is Cleon. It is Cleon whose "great epos" depicts the actions of "young, strong, fair, wise" "men"; whose sculpture depicts subjects such as "the young Phoebus" (285-88); and whose writings include "love-odes," but whose present view includes a strong young "rower" being watched by the beautiful young slave woman while Cleon, watching the two of them, feels "too grey / For being beloved" (294-99). It is Cleon whose "fate is deadlier" (309) than mere death (which all must suffer) because, he says,

> every day my sense of joy
> Grows more acute, my soul (intensified
> By power and insight) more enlarged, more keen;
> While every day my hairs fall more and more,
> My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase--
> The horror quickening still from year to year,
> The consummation coming past escape,
> When I shall know most, and yet least enjoy. . . .
> (310-17)

Cleon's grandiose conception of his intellect and of his consciousness is partially disguised as a philosophical statement about the human condition, but his letter as a whole reveals the source of his philosophy in his personal plight as a man who feels that his knowledge and his intuition of limitless bliss rank near God's, but who must age and die as though he were an ordinary man. To present this situation as that of a magic, special soul unjustly entrapped in a mortal body and to raise this story to the status of a mythic truth about humankind are tactics through which Cleon can exercise what he feels to be his omnipotent intellect by transforming reality into a Promethean tragedy about himself; and so he does.

In much the same way that Cleon transforms his thwarted fantasies of omnipotence into a philosophic version of Promethean tragedy, a creature so different from him as Caliban, "Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech" ("Caliban Upon Setebos" 23), transforms his "fantasy of himself as a god, as the Lord of Creation" (Melchiori 148) for the island's lower beings, into a theological account of his God, Setebos. Thus he temporarily seizes for himself the omnipotence of one who defines, and thus creates, his creator. Describing this project as "talk[ing] to his own self" about Setebos in any way "he please[s]," Caliban reveals his belief that his words have the power both to discomfit Setebos and to evade his knowledge: he speaks "Because to talk about Him, vexes--ha, / Could He but know!" (15-18).

In the succeeding speculations, Caliban predicates some further limitations upon Setebos's power; for example, Setebos is "ill at ease" because "He cannot change His cold, / Nor cure its ache" (31-33), and

he cannot "make a second self / To be His mate" (57-58). Having thus moved Setebos down toward the creation, Caliban moves creatures up toward Setebos: he has made creatures "Weaker in most points" than he is, but they are "stronger in a few" and are in some ways "what Himself would fain, in a manner, be" (62-63); he sometimes forces creatures to "submit" to him because that power "consoles" him for having "made things worthier than Himself," which "do more / Than He who made them!" (112-16). Furthermore, Setebos may have "something over" him "That made Him" and that is "Out of His reach" (129-33); and "This Quiet, all it hath a mind to, doth" (137). Setebos "perceives he cannot soar / To what is quiet and hath happy life;" so "out of very spite" he "Makes this a bauble-world" for "solace" and for "sport" (144-49). Thus Caliban further limits Setebos's potency and reinforces the view of Setebos's behavior as a product of his deficiencies and discontents.

The analogies with himself through which Caliban explains Setebos's motivations further expose the fantasies of omnipotence underlying Caliban's theology and indeed, his entire way of being. When Caliban gets drunk on his favorite home brew, he will "throw [himself] on [his] back i' the seeded thyme, / And wanton, wishing [he] were born a bird" (73-74), an unbounded, soaring self. If he "could make a live bird out of clay," a "Caliban / Able to fly," he would add to his "wings" a "great comb . . . to admire"--to win admiration for his specialness--and "a sting to do his foes offence"--to fulfill his wish for invulnerability. Then the Caliban-bird, extending Caliban's power, would "nip . . . off the horns / Of grigs high up" that now do not "mind" the grounded Caliban (76-84). If the bird were to break

"his leg" and call his maker for help, Caliban "might" provide him "three sound legs for one" or might "pluck the other off" (85-93). Either decision would enhance his feelings of omnipotence: "Were this no pleasure, lying in the thyme, / Drinking the mash, with brain become alive, / Making and marring clay at will?" (95-97).

The amoral (or pre-moral) nature of this "will" is mirrored in Setebos, who is "nor right nor wrong," "Nor kind, nor cruel," but simply "strong and Lord" (98-99). With the same will, Caliban rules a "file" of "crabs," mutilating one, feeding "a worm" to another: "As it likes me each time, I do: so He" (100-08). Caliban's way of feeling omnipotent and unlimited, an approach he attributes to Setebos, too, is thus revealed as essentially a matter of following impulses, being bound by no reasons or predictable rules of action: he will "make something" simply to occupy his "wit and strength," for "No use at all," and with equally little reason will "knock it down again" (191-99). He gains a sense of omnipotence by evading patterns and acting at random: he may tolerate "a squirrel that" stands up to him audaciously or "an urchin that . . . / Curls up" and plays dead in its fear of him (226-31), but he would not tolerate it if "either creature" assumed Caliban was bound always to behave the same way, for he "'Doth as he likes, or wherefore Lord?" (233-40). Having anything expected of him, since that asserts another's power to define him, infringes upon the impulsiveness and reckless destructiveness which characterize Caliban's quite infantile omnipotent self.

Mr. Sludge's indulgence in fantasies and feelings of omnipotence, freedom, and invulnerability is little less blatant than Caliban's.

The opportunity to have such feelings validated has strongly influenced Sludge's progression to ever-greater exploits as a medium: he has not only enjoyed getting his victims' affirmation for his performances, but has also gloried in the power he has gained to manipulate them, to say and do outrageous things that vented unacceptable impulses, and to get by with them, even to have his admirers defend them. Once he had convinced them of the genuineness of his gifts--an opening process satisfyingly easy for one so special as he feels he is--he was "spared all further trouble" (303). From that point on, he reminds Horsefall, he could "rave / Like an epileptic dervish in the books, / Foam, fling [him]self flat, rend [his] clothes to shreds; / No matter . . ." (304-07). Doubters at such exhibitions were vanquished by "the faithful" (364) while Sludge looked on like a king whose followers fight for him, defending the "'poor boy / 'Exposed by [their] good faith!'" (375-76).

It was "easy as an old shoe" (450) for him to learn the "tricks" they believed could not "be tricks" (434-35) and to produce the physical manifestations that enhanced his seances, for his ability to learn skills is well-nigh limitless (437-40). His exceptional powers of observation made it just as easy for him to tell his victims things about their lives that they thought he "'never could learn'" (494-99). Ignoring all the limits of propriety, Sludge sometimes spoke to the women in his audience about "the naked truth," evidently sexual, and they would "blush a little and forgive" (615-17) because of his special status. Altogether, Sludge has had many opportunities to experience the "triumphant" (460) sense of exercising a nearly limitless power to dominate their thoughts and reactions with respect

to his behavior: the members of his audience "grow mine," he says; "I veritably possess them . . ." (1428-29).

Sludge's speech suggests that his drive to preserve his fantasies of omnipotence and specialness and to find confirmation for them in the world shaped his beliefs and his view of events in his own life long before he took advantage of his opportunity to find such confirmation in the Horsefall circle. To understand the connection between Sludge's world view and his psychological needs, we need only observe his unfolding of the statement, "This trade of mine--I don't know, can't be sure / But there was something in it, tricks and all!" (809-10). His exposition of that "something" is no doubt partly motivated by his desire to persuade Horsefall not to expose him and perhaps even to continue as his patron; but it strikes me as both too excessive and too frequently ill-suited for that purpose to be an entirely calculated argument, totally under the speaker's conscious, rational control. Underlying and energizing it there seems to be an element of compulsive, grandiose self-assertion in the service of fantasies of omnipotence--an element of involuntary production which Sludge, with characteristic inelegance, describes as a feeling that he "somehow vomit[s]" what he is saying (808).

Arguing that religious ideas of "the miraculous" are so common in his culture that they are "sucked in with our mothers' milk" and "g[e]t inside of us at last" (838-41), Sludge sees it as a "natural" result that someone indoctrinated in "such teaching" will have a "firm expectancy and a frank look-out / For his own allotment, his especial share / I' the secret"--<u>if</u> he is "a person born to look that way" at

the world (860-66). "Just the same / Was I born," Sludge says, a "seer of the supernatural / Everywhen, everyhow and everywhere . . ." (873-76); he is innately "so sensitive" and "so alert, that, [with] practice," he can "guess what's going on outside the veil . . ." (1242-44). Unlike other children, Sludge held on to the Biblical view of the world, in which "the miraculous" is "commonplace" (1221), and with the "help" of this belief "explained [his] life" (884). When he found out that mere people "had worked wonders" for him in the guise of helpful "fairies" and Santa Claus, he preserved his belief in the miraculous (886-95) by pushing its source back one step to an "'unseen agency, outside the world, [which] / 'Prompted its puppets to do'" these wonders for him (898-99).

Everything that happens is thus "a sign" from "God" or "Providence" (924-27), a sign meant for him. "Sludge is of all-importance to himself" (945), the medium admits, and he "Look[s] . . . / Into each hour" to see "its infinitude / Of influences at work to profit" him. Able "To spy a providence in" the smallest circumstance, he "live[s] by signs and omens," supposing this special relationship with outer reality to be "Providence's whim and way / With only" him (958-78). His "luck" is "pure grace" (989), a "favour" (1056); and as he used his "gift" for communicating with the spirit world, he suspects, a "hand was holding" his and "Leading" him "In the end," even though at the beginning he thought he was "cheating" (1288-91).

Sludge's sense of himself as the possessor of special, magical powers which enable him to see what others cannot and his belief that he is the recipient of personal messages from providence place him in

the category of Browning monologuists whose quasi-religious conviction of being among the elect simply translates fantasies of omnipotence and specialness into Biblical and theological terms available in the culture. His characterization of religion as "no mere smile / O' contentment, sigh of aspiration," but rather as "life of life, and self of self" (1006-07, 1010), therefore catches quite well the self-reflexiveness of his religion, for to him piety consists of finding in the world "authentic intimation" (1000) that his grandiose conviction is true: that he is indeed "The one i' the world, the one for whom the world / Was made . . ." (1062-63).

V

Such feelings of omnipotence, invulnerability, and limitlessness, cherished by so many of Browning's monologuists, are of course unrealistic and therefore liable to injury. Being insulted by some person or event, encountering a situation that makes them feel weak or limited, or experiencing anything that calls their sense of godlike selfhood into question often triggers reactions such as overpowering rage; implacable vengefulness against those they see as responsible for wounding their grandiose self-conceptions; or when these reactions are suppressed or are frustrated by external reality, festering resentment and chronic envy of others who somehow interfere with their preserving their feeling that they really are as they are in their fantasies.

The Duke of "My Last Duchess" is quite typical of Browning's injured monologuists. He encountered in the Duchess a "threat to his godlike sway over" his world (King, Focusing Artifice 69): she unwittingly wounded his fantasy-self whenever she failed to be his

perfect audience, for her flawed responses cast doubt upon the magic of his "name," his sexuality, and his "will" (33, 25, 36). His desire to wipe out his psychic wound (evidence that he must be weak and vulnerable) drove him to prove to himself that since he could abolish the source of his wound, he must be omnipotent and invulnerable after all. Thus, by exercising his power to have the Duchess removed, the Duke turned his rage into confirmation of his omnipotence.

The vengefulness of the speaker in "The Laboratory" exemplifies the connection of unreined grandiose feelings with the drive to abolish the source of an injury. Unlike the Duke, the injured woman seems to be swept away by such feelings, as though they have taken over her habitual psychic state. Her lover and her new rival have evidently flaunted their emerging alliance without fearing the consequences: "they whispered" to each other in front of her the night before (33) and apparently have not attempted to hide their being together even now--"laugh[ing] at" her, she believes, and thinking she has taken refuge in the "church, to pray God in, for them!" (7-8). Their assumption suggests that her actual plan to <u>play</u> God for them, after a stop at the neighborhood poison shop, is not what they would expect. Her later remark that the poison "prevents seeing" her rival's death "close" (42) indicates that she is somewhat surprised at herself and a bit squeamish about her own plan. The injury she has received seems initially to have provoked an unusually infantile attempt at revenge: she has tried to make her rival "fall / Shrivelled" by looking at her hard and wishing her dead (33-36)--not an approach one would expect her to try if she were accustomed to feeling rage directly and transforming

it into an action that will work in reality. For these reasons, I suspect that the speaker's fantasies of omnipotence have been long repressed and her feelings of injured grandiosity both suppressed and externally frustrated by an environment in which men choose and change their women as they please while women, whose energies are supposed to be directed toward being chosen and not changed, are expected to respond meekly to men's fickleness and other women's betrayals.

The speaker's repressed fantasies of omnipotence and her suppressed rage at her wounds thus boil up together as the "smokes" rise from the poison-maker's apparatus (1-3), where power to get revenge is being brewed. Feeling her own needs for power and revenge releasing themselves here, where the means for fulfilling them are all but in her grasp, the woman is far from manifesting "inscrutable repose and sadist calm" (Shaw 69); she is very excited:

> That in the mortar--you call it a gum?
> Ah, the brave tree whence such gold oozings come!
> And yonder soft phial, the exquisite blue,
> Sure to taste sweetly,--is that poison too? (13-16)

She would love to have "all" this "wild crowd of invisible pleasures," all these forms of "pure death" (17-19), for with them she could take reckless revenge against anyone who has ever wounded her grandiose self-conception by being in some way superior to her:

> . . . a mere lozenge to give,
> And Pauline should have just thirty minutes to live!
> But to light a pastile, and Elise, with her head
> And her breast and her arms and her hands, should drop
> dead! (21-24)

As her attention focuses on her current rival, however, the speaker grows more cruelly practical and concrete. She considers whether the chemist's preparation will be attractive to the victim and

envisions the great moment when the other woman will "try it and taste," then "fix and prefer!" (28). She dwells upon the painful, humiliating details of the rival's offensive being--the superior beauty that has so thoroughly "ensnared" the speaker's lover that he will never forget her (30-32). These thoughts only increase the woman's determination to use the "drop" that "does it all" (29, 36). It will destroy the rival's beauty as it ends her life, and it will leave a permanent image of ugliness in the lover's "masculine eyes" (31): do not "spare her the pain," she orders the chemist; "Let death be felt and the proof remain: / Brand, burn up, bite into its grace-- / He is sure to remember her dying face!" (37-40).

Given the double satisfaction of such an outcome, the speaker willingly pays her "whole fortune's fee" for the poison, brushing aside any thought of unwanted consequences (43-44) as though a person so invulnerable as she is, now that she has the poison, need only make sure that the chemist "brush this dust off" her before she leaves (47). Her giving the "old man" permission to "kiss" her (46) seems to indicate neither "sexual frustration" (King, Focusing Artifice 77) nor an obsessive repetition of her injury (Shaw 69), but instead a heady sense of having gained power over the sex which so recently controlled her sense of herself. In the grip of submerged fantasies of herself as the Goddess of Death, conferring the kiss of death where she pleases, the speaker rushes toward a grand union of omnipotence and vengeance at a royal ball which is about to become a Dance of Death: "next moment I dance at the King's!" (48).

No such prospect of living out his fantasies of omnipotence and invulnerability consoles Caliban, whose world has wounded his grandiosity so many times that he knows he cannot get vengeance on a grand scale. He has seen "proof" that Setebos "is terrible" (200): once he spent "half the winter" working on a well-made trap for "she-tortoises," only to witness how Setebos sent "one wave" that suddenly "licked the whole labor flat"; more recently Caliban watched "a ball flame down" from the sky and hit the place where he had just been napping; and he has found a fossilized "newt He may have envied once / And turned to stone, shut up inside a stone" (205-15). Of such displays Caliban says, "there is force!" (213). Though many creatures can "flee afar, . . . dive, [or] . . . run up trees" to escape Setebos's destructive power (219-20), Caliban believes himself to be among the creatures Setebos intentionally made vulnerable (172):

> Had He meant other, while His hand was in,
> Why not make horny eyes no thorn could prick,
> Or plate my scalp with bone against the snow,
> Or overscale my flesh 'neath joint and joint,
> Like an orc's armor? Ay,--so spoil His sport!
> (173-77)

Thus recognizing his "weakness" relative to Setebos, Caliban vents his chronic resentment in minor revenges. He does what would "vex" Setebos "Could He but know" (18)--defining Setebos as limited, for example. He enjoys the spectacle of other creatures venting their rage at an enemy--for example, he imitates a jaybird's distress call, then watches how "little birds that hate the jay / Flock within stone's throw, glad their foe is hurt" (117-21). He fools Setebos so as "to escape His ire" by "not . . . seem[ing] too happy" (256-57)--"he mainly dances on dark nights" and "gets under holes to laugh," while he

"Moans," "groans," and "curses" when he is "Outside" "in the sun," where Setebos can see him (266-69). And he engages in acts of insubordination toward the resident humans, who stand in loco Setebos in Caliban's life--for example, one reason he decides to speak when he does is that "Prosper and Miranda sleep / In confidence he drudges at their task, / And it is good to cheat the pair . . ." (20-22).

Most of all, he duplicates on a small scale Setebos's shows of force toward weaker beings, taking his anger out on substitutes for the real object of rage. Attacking some crabs or insects offers him occasional relief. The ongoing outlet for his rage is his fantasy-household, in which he "'Plays . . . at being Prosper in a way, / Taketh his mirth with make-believes" (168-69). Caliban has made himself "a book of broad leaves," "a wand," and "an enchanter's robe" for assuming Prospero's role of tyrant-magician; he rides herd on "an ounce" which stands in for "Miranda and [his] wife"; and "his Ariel" is a "crane / He bids go wade for fish and straight disgorge" (152-62). Lowest of all is

> a sea-beast, lumpish, which he snared,
> Blinded the eyes of, and brought somewhat tame,
> And split its toe-webs, and now pens the drudge
> In a hole o' the rock and calls him Caliban;
> A bitter heart that bides its time and bites. (163-67)

The sustained existence of this hierarchy in which he stands at the top, with the "mate" Setebos lacks (57-58) and a servant to get food for him, provides Caliban a compensatory kingdom where he avenges his loss of freedom to Setebos and to Prospero and Miranda by taking freedom from others for himself.

The function of the "sea-beast" Caliban in this order is more complex. The creature's chillingly effective mutilations and captivity deprive it of the use of its rightful heritage, the boundless sea, so that it reflects Caliban's view of his own unjust disinheritance, at the hands of Prospero and Setebos, of the limitless existence he longs for. It is thus a figure of protest against Caliban's state. His cruel treatment of the "lumpish" creature which is his own stand-in suggests that the poor "drudge" is the target of Caliban's externalized contempt for himself and his real limitations, which repeatedly spoil his dream of being his fantasized limitless self. Since Caliban's replication of the island hierarchy smacks of the creation of a set of images to be used in sympathetic magic, his representation of himself as "A bitter heart that bides its time and bites" (167) may in his mind be both a way of convincing himself that he, too, is just waiting for the right opportunity to take revenge on his oppressors and an attempt to double the pressure of his magic wish for that opportunity.

Mr. Sludge is another "bitter heart that bides its time and bites" ("Caliban Upon Setebos" 167), a man whose progress toward control of his world has just been undone and whose very successes have exposed him to painful psychic injuries inflicted by his snobbish patrons. He seizes the occasion of Horsefall's discovery of his cheating to avenge himself: he verbally cuts Horsefall and his circle to bits and manipulates Horsefall into leaving him free to take further revenge through gossip.

Horsefall's attack on Sludge in the beginning and his threat to "tell" bring the speaker's suppressed contempt for and defiance toward

his patron into the open: "Go tell, then! Who the devil cares . . ." ("Mr. Sludge, 'The Medium'" 15). His vindictiveness adds a threatening tone to his bargaining to get "passage out" to England, some money, Horsefall's silence until Sludge sails, and continued possession of his patron's "presents" to him (58-69) in return for a confession. He justifies his vengefulness by blaming his victim: "Tread on a worm, it turns, sir! If I turn, / Your fault! 'Tis you'll have forced me!" (72-73). He renews the threat as he begins his account of himself: "Here goes,--but keep your temper, or I'll scream!" (82). Again blame follows: "It's all your fault, you curious gentlefolk! / You're prigs . . ." (85-86).

In this context of contempt and defiance, each of Sludge's revelations about the way he gained influence over his followers becomes an act of revenge for their condescending attitudes, which have repeatedly injured his sense of omnipotence. They thought of him as their "boy" and their "lawful prize," to be exhibited like a possession (165, 174). They commented on "'his ignorance'" as the reason that messages from the distinguished dead came out "'as bran-new Sludge,'" muddled and cheapened (338-46). Once he had been "bought and sold" (423) and had moved on to manufacture spirit-manifestations and messages from patrons' dead family members, they would take the edge off his every accomplishment by saying he was not intelligent and alert enough to have accomplished it on his own (464-65, 493-94). He still smarts at what he knows they thought him to be: "'Vain and vindictive'" (558); one of "'these hysteric, hybrid half-and-halfs, / 'Equivocal, worthless vermin'" (567-68); a "'half-tamed prairie dog'"

who should "'cower duly at [his] keeper's beck'" (576-77); their "'pet'" (706) who would never "'dare'" to cheat them (580).

Part of his revenge for these insults came as they occurred:

> . . . my wise sir, I dared--
> Did cheat you first, made you cheat others next,
> And had the help o' your vaunted manliness
> To bully the incredulous. You used me?
> Have not I used you, taken full revenge. . . .
> (580-84)

Sludge's acts of revenge, in which he responded to recurring injuries by drawing his patrons into ever-deeper commitments of their lives and reputations to his "Sludgehood" (1428), have "wiped out scores with" them in the sense that he has "swallowed down [his] bread of shame, / And shake[s] the crumbs off--where but in [their] face?" (657, 662-63). He owes them nothing save "The gratitude, forsooth, of a prostitute" to her customers and pimp (783-84, 789).

But these day-to-day revenges have not repaid Horsefall for the further offenses of having caught Sludge, having physically overpowered him, and having continued to be in command of the medium's fate--where Sludge will go, the amount of money he will take with him, and the like. Sludge's realization that Horsefall can drive him away, under terms that he can at best improve by a hundred dollars and a promise that the story will not go to the newspapers (1493-94), deeply wounds his sense of having gained great power and freedom approaching the omnipotence and limitlessness of his grandiose fantasies. Sludge cannot match his patron's social position and economic power, and he knows it; that is why his speech--his revenge for the injuries of class that he has just received and is about to receive--returns over and over to the project of excoriating the "self-conceit" (89) of his

properly Bostonian patrons; of heaping scorn on such class-associated habits as their affected intonations, their concern for prestige masquerading as an attachment to highbrow culture, their love of money, and their ill-concealed snobbery; of exposing their lack of intellectual and spiritual substance; of spreading verbal excrement impartially over them and their lives as well as himself and his.

Reducing them to his lowest common denominator--knowing the details that allow him to reduce them--asserts the power of his magic words to transmogrify his enemies' status and thus to abolish, at least in part, the source of his injuries. His plans to finish off Horsefall in this way take form once that gentleman has retired for the night: "You've found out Sludge? / We'll see that presently: my turn, sir, next! / I too can tell my story" (1503-05). He sketches out his script, taking into account Horsefall's preoccupation with his dead mother:

> . . . what had I done?
> How did it all go? I said he poisoned her,
> And hoped he'd have grace given him to repent,
> Whereon he picked this quarrel, bullied me
> And called me cheat: I thrashed him,--who could help?
> He howled for mercy, prayed me on his knees
> To cut and run and save him from disgrace:
> I do so, and once off, he slanders me.
> An end of him! Begin elsewhere anew! (1514-22)

Sludge, like Caliban, thus adapts his rage at threats to his grandiosity into a form of dramatic enactment which, like Caliban's performances before his Miranda, Ariel, and surrogate Caliban, will allow him to fulfill some of his needs for revenge and for restoration of his omnipotent, invulnerable feelings. In their cases, the psychodynamics of vengeance cycle back to a form of the performer-gazer

relationship from which they can draw confirmation enough to assuage their injuries while they bide their time or begin elsewhere anew.

Variations on the psychodynamics of vengeance represented in "My Last Duchess" and "The Laboratory" recur in later monologuists: in Guido of The Ring and the Book and in others such as the speaker of "A Forgiveness" and Cristina, the speaker of "Cristina and Monaldeschi." As Symons noted long ago, the wronged husband of "A Forgiveness" particularly resembles the Duke of "My Last Duchess" (176), but he also shares characteristics with the woman of "The Laboratory." The husband, like the Duke a nobleman of great "Power and place" (7), addresses a priest who, in the course of hearing his confession, has "question[ed]" him about the fate of his long-dead wife (2-3). As it turns out, the speaker manipulated his wife into wounding herself with a poisoned knife some time after he discovered she was having an affair with another man whose identity she never revealed, but who (as the speaker knew from the first) was in fact the priest now hearing the confession. With a subtlety and deliberation outstripping the Duke's, the husband uses his speech to complete a double vengeance which, like that of the speaker in "The Laboratory," has involved leaving one offender alive to contemplate the suffering and death of the other.

The husband's description of his public life makes clear his interest in approaching and exhibiting absolute power. Before he discovered his wife's unfaithfulness, he was like an "athlete," running "life's race, / With the whole world to see" his "prodigious gains / Of good"; at home he felt rewarded further by the love of his wife (8-14). After the discovery, his need for omnipotence led him to "work on"

(110) for three years as though nothing had happened: in their social life, he and his wife played "stage-king and queen" in public, managing to show "calm and concord" and to say and do all the right things to inspire in their "audience . . . a frenzy-fit / Of sympathetic rapture" (118-37); at work, the speaker says, his "soul" "unfurled / . . . its wings," and the results are "in evidence, / Perhaps in history . . ." (148-53). Eventually, he "touched ambition's height," attaining "glory" in the form of the "chain" (196-97) of the highest office and the king's attendance at "a loud night-feast" at their "palace, where / Such visiting left glory evermore" (156, 160-61). His power remains enormous, "merely (when such measures are required) / Dealing out doom to people by three words, / A signature and seal . . ." (282-84).

The husband's need for invulnerability is reflected in his private, "lone / Chamber sepulchred for [his] very own / Out of the palace-quarry," a room to be reached only by "serpentining ways" and "stairs tunnelled through the stone"; it is his "entrenchment to withstand / Invasion" by "The multifarious herd" of his underlings (177-93). In this already unassailable room, the speaker keeps an "arquebuss" (201) and a collection of "arms of Eastern workmanship" whose "Horror coquetting with voluptuousness" (248-49) arouses in their owner an excitement quite similar to that of the woman who sees in the poison-maker's laboratory the means to seize a portable omnipotence. His "favourite" requires an especially detailed description, blade and handle, engraving and carving, "jadestone" and "ruby-specks" (263-77).

For a personality as preoccupied with preserving a sense of omnipotence and invulnerability as the denizen of such a room must be, his wife's unfaithfulness was an intolerable injury. Before that happened, the husband had compromised his quest for absolute power over everyone and absolute invulnerability to everyone by allowing himself to rely on her love to confirm his greatness (13-18) and even letting her breach his "fortress" to sit with him and sketch while he worked in his cave-room (183, 170-71). Because he had thus allowed her love to mediate his grandiose fantasies, her adultery conveyed the message that these fantasies, like her love, were a "lie" (63). Her urging him, within seconds of his spotting her fleeing lover, to do her the favor of killing her (72) seemed to demonstrate her absolute love for the other man, which would survive "'any searching of'" her husband's "'steel'" (82-83), and her absolute hatred for the speaker, which she expressed as sexual revulsion (84-88).

The speaker was also humiliated by having erred in his judgment of his wife, whom he had idealized as "'God's sacramental cup'" when she was really "'a barber's basin'" (101, 99); his brilliant intellect had fallen far short of omniscience. Worst of all, perhaps, he had to turn his married life to "art-mimetic" (122) because he could not get the position of power he wanted unless he avoided a scandal (329-40). To desire and to have the means to wipe her out but to be unable to do so because of the power of social expectations compounded the speaker's injury by subjecting him to the control of a society of lesser men.

Revenge enough to wipe out the speaker's multiple injuries could not come from such a simple thing as killing his wife immediately,

which she wanted. Instead, on the day after his discovery of the affair, he simply told her that he would devote himself entirely to his work now and, except when the two of them appeared together in public, he gave her "No sign of recognition" (127) for the three years leading up to his accession to highest office. He waited until she asked to speak with him in his office-cavern, where she confessed, according to the speaker, that all along she "'loved'" him--"'the truth'" that had been her "'shame" and "'three years' torture'" (241-46, 290)--and that she was unfaithful to him only because, needing him so much while he seemed to care only for "'statecraft,'" she wanted "'to teach'" him that any "'fool'" would risk everything for her (309-15). When the speaker found she had not pretended to love him while actually hating him, he could revise his feelings upward from "'contempt'" to "'hate'" and "'Let hate's punishment / Replace contempt's!'" (355-64). He gave her paper to write--at her suggestion, he says, in her own blood (369)--a statement that her lover was a "'"mere / Mud-ball to fling and make love foul with!"'" (366-68). Since he had given her a poisoned dagger to draw the blood, the husband's "'hate'" now "'passed away / In vengeance,'" and he promised to love her once she was dead (378-83). Sure enough, he tells the priest, "She sleeps, as erst / Beloved, in this your church . . ." (387-88).

A number of elements contribute to the speaker's satisfaction with this revenge. He proved to himself that his will is in charge of him no matter what. For three years he was able to withdraw his emotions completely from the woman whose love he had relied upon (221-22, 227-28); thus he has reassured himself that he is totally self-sufficient,

and therefore invulnerable, after all. He proved to himself that his "merciless intellect" (Symons 176) can rule in even the most difficult situation, bringing about an optimal outcome that no one else could have attained: because he refrained from taking immediate revenge in the heat of anger, he has no "regret" and needs no "Atonement" (293-99). His intellectual decision has resulted in a superior revenge: his wife burned in the "penance-fire" of her own conscience (240) for a long time while he preserved appearances in his "'paraded life'" (337) and successfully continued his work while she wasted away; he found out her real view of him and was able to "'Dictate'" her blood-written confession (374); and like a medieval moral theologian laying down rules to judge the seriousness of her sin, he responded with well-regulated feelings: hating but pretending love merited contempt; loving but acting in a way that looked like hating merited hate; dying merited "'pardon'"; being dead merits love (355-64, 382).

All this intelligence and control almost merits the name of omnipotence, the quality which the speaker's vengeance against his wife has nearly proven him to have--but not quite. Only this confession to his wife's lover can do that. The story tortures the priest with the knowledge that his mistress suffered terribly until her death, that she did not love him, and that her husband is a calculating and effective revenger. The speaker's final revelation that he knows the confessor to have been the lover crowns the husband's omnipotence with omniscience. It also confirms the perfection of his intellect and self-control: he has chosen his situation for speaking so carefully that if he does not kill the priest with the same "favourite" knife

that poisoned his wife (he has earlier implied he <u>might</u> have it with him [262-64]), the priest will have to live with the knowledge he has gained but can reveal to no one. Violating the seal of the confessional would expose and increase his own guilt, and he would have to oppose someone far more ruthless and powerful than he is. Bishop Blougram's revenge on Gigadibs--to silence the most momentous thing the journalist knows to say and make him feel his smallness--would be raised to an excruciating level if the husband in this case did not kill his opponent, but chose the more subtle revenge of mental torture over the way of inferior men who merely stab their enemies and release them from further suffering.

In "Cristina and Monaldeschi," the speaker's injured grandiosity, like that of the husband in "A Forgiveness," stems from her having allowed part of her self-conception to depend upon another person and then having been betrayed. Like the husband, too, she must wipe out the injury by withdrawing her self from the offender's sphere of influence and proceeding to destroy him. Cristina, the former queen of Sweden (see DeVane 464-66 for an account of the historical basis of the poem), speaks to her courtier and lover, the Marquis Monaldeschi, as they stroll through a gallery at Fontainebleau where King Francis and his mistress Diane are memorialized in decorations combining "her Crescent / With his Salamander-sign" (13-14). As they walk, she holds up as a model the love between Francis and Diane: "he her god, / She his idol" (3-4), "they witness to incessant / Love like ours" (9-10).

Hers is an ideal of the merger of their beings in which each would feed the other's sense of omnipotence and invulnerability, an ideal

which could only be maintained for her if Monaldeschi did nothing to disturb her feeling of omnipotent control. Like the Duke, Cristina cannot tolerate realities that call into question her habit of commanding others: she must always "be Francis" (25), so that as she looks at the gallery's symbols, she associates herself with his salamander, which lived "on flame" that did not harm it but was "injurious / . . . to fools who woke its ire" (21-22). Before Monaldeschi can protest her assumption of the male role, Cristina comments suggestively that "male hearts" like hers "retain / Heat nor, once warm, cool again" (27-28) and adds that besides, no one could think her "the woman": "See my habit, / Ask my people!" (33-34). However, Cristina no longer has her subjects, for she has "abjured" her "crown" for him (139-41). Thus it is urgent that her need to "be Francis" (25) be met elsewhere, in her relationship with Monaldeschi.

Altogether, Cristina's need for merger with Monaldeschi ("he her god") and her need for absolute rule in their relationship ("she his idol") have placed her lover in a precarious position. From the beginning of their relationship, she has evidently regarded as dangerous or somehow disgraceful the part of herself that seeks merger, or as she says, "still proves me female" (110). As she sees it now, Monaldeschi's persistence extorted that part of her into activity: she "First . . . hated" him, "then, at best, / . . . . acquiesced;" out of "compassion," she accepted him and "raised" him to a position "above" her (42-45). In doing so, however, she was chary of the way her submissive side "confessed / All its secrets to" her lover (142-43): his vow to "'hide'" her "'secrets'" (128) was apparently crucial in

satisfying her that she would retain her invulnerability. Also essential was their vow to love only each other, with "no third between" (87). So long as Monaldeschi held to these vows, Cristina's need to rule in the relationship would not be an issue. It was Monaldeschi's task to do nothing that would threaten Cristina's feeling of continued invulnerability and omnipotence and thus arouse her to demonstrate her absolute power.

His failure at this task occasions the speech Cristina makes in the gallery of Francis and Diane: we hear in the monologue the voice of her injured omnipotence asserting itself and demanding his total submission to its claims. With malign slyness she begins by revealing gradually her knowledge of her lover's failure. Claiming Francis's salamander for herself, she assigns Diane's crescent to Monaldeschi, for "Crescents change, . . . wax and wane, / Woman-like . . ." (25-27). "What? / Take offence?" she then asks with mock surprise; "My Love forgot / He plays woman, I do not?" (30-32). This role reversal signifies three essential strands in the remainder of her speech: she is reclaiming, without qualification, the male-associated omnipotent control which, as we have seen, she allowed herself to qualify because of Monaldeschi's vows; because, "woman-like" (27), he has broken the vows by letting a "third between" (87), she feels terribly injured and is enraged at him; and her revenge will be to make him feminine in another way, by demanding his total submission to her--and getting it one way or another.

Her sense of injury is complex. She has two intertwined metaphors for the way Monaldeschi came to be her lover, each of which

reveals a different aspect of her wound. One figures her as a lady situated on a high place who set up a ladder that he used to climb to her "step by step" (49, 46) in stages defined by her response to him. Now, however, he thinks he can go down "step by step," this time defining the ladder's rungs according to his response to her: you think, she says, that you can "Pity me, become my friend, / Like me, like less, loathe at end . . ." (46-48). His presumptuous belief that he may choose to go down the ladder--her ladder--on his terms, any time he wants to, outrages Cristina:

> That's the ladder's round you rose by!
> That--my own foot kicked away,
> Having raised you: let it stay,
> Serve you for retreating? Nay. (49-52)

The ladder metaphor, which emphasizes Cristina's expectation of controlling the relationship, is complemented by another in which she is a mountain and Monaldeschi a mountain climber:

> Lonely I stood long: 'twas clever
> When you climbed, before men's eyes,
> Spurned the earth and scaled the skies,
> Gained my peak and grasped your prize. (61-64)

Cristina's grandiose sense of her mammoth stature and lofty self-sufficiency, both associated with a phallic object quite suitable to her self-acknowledged male qualities, contrasts with her sense of her lover's merely human smallness and audacious behavior. She figures again as the unmoved partner who, once attained, has a right to expect the other to be the same: since "Close to me you climbed," she orders, "as close by, / Keep your station, though the peak / Reached proves somewhat bare and bleak!" (53-55). She thus reveals that in addition

to offending her by expecting autonomy, Monaldeschi has wounded her by finding her less than irresistibly attractive.

Compounding these injuries is the fact that Cristina, like other Browning performers, is audience-conscious. Other people watched as Monaldeschi "climbed" (62); others looked on with "wonder" when he "stood" with her (65); and now others "are used to this same grouping," the two of them "like statues seen" (85-86). If Monaldeschi changes toward her, others will "think [them] friends turned foes" (83); others will suspect that he tired of her, or that she, the great unmoved omniscient one, has made a mistake about him; others will see her as vulnerable. Even if Cristina were invulnerable to Monaldeschi's cooling toward her, she is not invulnerable to the thought of having been vulnerable or having been seen by others as vulnerable.

Cristina has two alternative plans for revenge against this lover with a will and inclinations of his own. The first would require him to follow one simple command: "You must needs begin to love me . . ." (41). She means, given her interest in maintaining the public image of "incessant / Love" (9-10) between them, that he must acknowledge and submit to her omnipotence and must preserve the appearance of idolizing her. Her conditions are clear:

> Keep here, loving me forever!
> Love's look, gesture, speech, I claim;
> Act love, lie love, all the same--
> Play as earnest were our game! (57-60)

If Monaldeschi "makes the scene" (88) with her that she wants, holds "the pose" (82) in which she stands and he kneels worshipping her (66, 76), she will spare him the fate of pushing him down to "Yawning death in [the] abyss" at the foot of her mountain-self (70-72). Under these

conditions, Cristina's injuries would be revenged through her lover's involuntary servitude; everyone would see her as being in absolute control of him, and he would have to suffer total subjugation by a woman he does not love, is tired of, and constantly fears. His consent to this arrangement would result in a dramatized revenge like Sludge's.

However, Monaldeschi's "hesitancy" and "Silent" evasion of Cristina's first plan (101, 104) and his inability to "Look [her] in the eyes" and say he has been "faithful" to his vows to her (113-17) show Cristina that she must proceed to her second plan: to wipe out his insubordination, and with it her feeling of weakness and vulnerability, by more radical means. Leading him to an adjoining gallery, she gives commands to the men waiting there:

> Friends, my four! You, Priest, confess him!
> I have judged the culprit there:
> Execute my sentence! Care
> For no mail such cowards wear!
> Done, Priest? Then, absolve and bless him!
> Now--you three, stab thick and fast,
> Deep and deeper! Dead at last?
> Thanks, friends--Father, thanks! (129-36)

Cristina has repaired her injured sense of omnipotence by proving that through her omnipotent speech, she can run a court, a confessional, and a death squad simultaneously at top speed and efficiency, without failing to enjoy herself ("Deep and deeper!") or forgetting her manners (she thanked men, good). The "secrets" (143) of her idealizing, merging side are now as silent as the dead Monaldeschi, and she has, it seems, succeeded in suppressing their source within her, thus triumphing over the internal as well as the external conditions that have interfered with her sense of omnipotence.

VI

A composite psychological profile representing the prototypical Browning monologuist emerges from the foregoing survey. Over and over this poet's speakers express their sense of themselves as performers--as performative selves--and live up to their self-billing with exhibitionistic behavior that reflects their concern with getting a response from an audience. Preoccupied with the way the world watches them and their performances, they monitor others' facial expressions and gestures, hoping especially to see the smiles and approving gazes that make them feel they have been validated. For them, however, any sign of being noticed, of getting attention, may be preferable to absence of the recognition they need to confirm the reality of their performative selves.

This need indicates some degree of what I have called ontological dependence, a condition in which one must have one's performances seen and acknowledged in order to feel that one fully exists, that one's being has been completed. Without such confirmation, Browning monologuists may suffer feelings of vague deficiency and may exert considerable pressure on others to be responsive audiences as they strive to make the external world into a stage for their performances. They seek a situation in which the self-as-performer and the other-as-spectator form a single configuration of experience, two sides of the same coin. Some of them associate this situation with being an infant or a small child, suggesting that their search for it may represent an attempt to preserve or recapture a very early relationship.

Within the context of their performer-spectator relationships, the monologuists seek and often experience some degree of merger between themselves and the audience: as they perform, extending some of their being toward the audience and getting some of the audience's back in the form of recognition, their sense of their psychic boundaries frequently weakens or becomes unusually fluid, resulting in an intermingling of being. This intermingling, though potentially a balanced interchange, almost always is not: rather the speakers tend either to be in a mode of absorbing others, taking in and possessing them, or to be in a mode of being absorbed by others, blending into and often idealizing them; they may swing back and forth between these modes. In addition to merging with other people, Browning's speakers often experience other states of merged being: they may feel that their being subsumes the outside world in general, especially their own possessions and productions--an attitude that brings the world into consonance with them and allows them to extend their sense of their personal being beyond their actual boundaries; or occasionally they may feel themselves subsumed into the outside world, dispersed (or drained) into it.

Besides having these commonalities in their way of relating to others and the world, many of Browning's monologuists are preoccupied with the enjoyment and defense of grandiose self-conceptions. They have fantasies of being or becoming limitless, omnipotent, and invulnerable, and at times their behavior reveals that they are operating, more or less successfully, on the assumption that these fantasies are true, or can be made true, in reality. Often such

fantasies seem to underlie their feeling of being very special, or of being extraordinarily lucky, or of being among the elect, or of possessing magical powers to say words that will reign over others and to make wishes that will be granted by the universe. They feel entitled to have these feelings about themselves acknowledged and affirmed not only by other people, but also by the total scheme of things in external reality. Other people and the world, they assume, exist to be in relation to them.

Because their fantasies and expectations are quite unrealistic, these Browning speakers frequently encounter realities that do not honor their beliefs about themselves. Not only being treated badly, but also finding themselves in situations that place actual limits upon them or prove to be beyond their control, or encountering others who question their greatness or respond to them as if they were ordinary human beings--all such experiences represent terrible wounds to their grandiose self-conceptions. Such wounds enrage them, and their rage drives them to wipe out the injury, to abolish the reality that has insulted them, by taking revenge, even if the risk they incur by doing so is very great. When revenge is not possible, they may suppress it, nursing it in the form of chronic resentment of unappreciative others. Thus, denied the supply of confirmation that they need in order to maintain their sense of themselves, they seek to prove to themselves the worthlessness of the confirmation they might have received from the unresponsive other by destroying or whittling away at its being. They move on; they seek another other; pouring out their grievances about

the other other, they wait to be filled up with confirmation. They will never have enough of it.

This set of generalizations indicates that in Browning's monologuists, a number of traits are consistently associated, and we can detect some of their possible interrelationships--for example, between seeing the self as a performer and seeking to make others into an audience; between experiences of merger and an expanded, grandiose self-image; or between feeling that image to be threatened and reacting vengefully against the other(s) responsible for the injury. These generalizations and interrelationships, however, are inadequate to deal with a number of issues that must be addressed if we are to understand these characters in depth, as living wholes from which their monologues arise and take their form.

We know, for example, that a number of the monologuists refer to childhood experience, and we have noted phenomena suggesting that infantile modes of being may linger on in these speakers; but we do not have a way of explaining the genesis of their traits or of connecting their infantile qualities to their characters seen as wholes. We know that certain interrelated traits appear in these characters; but we do not know how they fit together as a complex but unified structure, and we do not know the nature of the causal sequences and interactions between and among them that explain the psychodynamics of the characters. Finally, we are aware that in some of the monologuists--but not all--these traits are associated with obvious unhappiness, poor functioning, or destructive behavior; but we lack rigorous, well-defined means to assess the speakers' psychological development,

character structure, and psychodynamic processes relative to some standard of health which is subtle and discriminating enough to be applicable to all the speakers. In this situation, an appropriate array of theoretical concepts, chosen for the closeness of fit between the types of phenomena they deal with and the key traits we have inferred, could supply the holistic, dynamic explanations that we would like to have. With this goal in mind, in the next chapter I will examine and synthesize the theoretical concepts that seem to me most likely to be useful in formulating such explanations.

CHAPTER 3
THEORIES OF NARCISSISTIC CHARACTER AND EXPERIENCE

The constellation of character traits and patterns of experience found in a large number of Browning's monologuists strikingly resembles that described in several theories of narcissism. These theories, though in a number of respects not metapsychologically compatible, offer an array of what Heinz Kohut calls "experience-near" concepts (Analysis xv) that are highly compatible with the phenomena we observe in Browning's monologuists when we attempt to know them, as Rader suggests we must, by extending to them the epistemological tactics that we adopt with real people ("Notes" 107).

As a framework within which to understand these phenomena, an appropriate theory would offer a way to analyze character synchronically as well as diachronically. Because Browning's monologues do not always contain information about the speaker's earlier life and even the longest ones occupy just a few hours of fictive time, the theory should be capable of grasping character as a structure--a constellation--rather than requiring us to have data on a long-term developmental process. Because even the shortest monologues often represent changes in the balance of psychic forces within the character structure, the basic theory should also be able to account for these shifts. The theory of Karen Horney, together with further

work on narcissism by Muriel Ivimey, one of her early followers, seems to me particularly well adapted to fulfill these conditions while at the same time remaining open to concepts of narcissistic character suggested by other theorists, especially Alice Miller, Arnold Rothstein, and Heinz Kohut.

I

Essential to Horney's view of human nature and thus to her view of healthy and neurotic development is her concept of the real self, a "central inner force" which, under "favorable conditions," naturally directs "growth" toward actualization of the person's intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal "potentialities" (Neurosis 17-18; hereafter cited as NHG). Healthy development is this growth toward self-realization. Under unfavorable conditions, however, when a child is denied "warmth," "good will," and "healthy friction with the wishes and wills of others," (s)he develops "basic anxiety"--a "feeling of being isolated and helpless in a world conceived as potentially hostile" (NHG 18). As defenses against this anxiety, the child has available three major interpersonal defensive moves: "toward, against, [and] away from others" (NHG 19). These moves, which parallel the defenses of submission, fight, and flight found among lower animals (Paris, "Horney" 59), are adaptive when used flexibly and selectively according to what is appropriate in a given situation; but the child gripped by basic anxiety uses them in an "extreme and rigid" way, and the "contradictory attitudes toward others" that result place him or her in a state of conflict that (s)he attempts to escape "by making one of these moves consistently predominant" (NHG 19).

Growth toward self-realization begins to lose ground to self-alienation as the child's personality organizes itself more and more around compulsively maintaining this dominant defense. Losing touch with the real self, the child lacks "a feeling of identity" (NHG 21). (S)he thus creates an imagined identity or "idealized image" that glorifies both the dominant defense ("'solution'") and the "contradictory trends" associated with the now-subordinated defensive moves (NHG 22-23). This idealized image evolves into "an idealized self" that comes "to represent to [the person] what he 'really' is, or potentially is--what he could be, and should be" (NHG 23). This usually compensatory and always imaginary self might be thought of as the glamorizer and justifier of the person's defense system. Because it fulfills all the person's needs so well, having after all arisen from them, the idealized self draws more and more psychic energy into "the search for glory," which "drives [the person] toward actualizing the idealized self" (NHG 24).

Once the search for glory has taken charge of the personality, "neurotic ambition" drives the individual to achieve "external success" for its own sake (NHG 25). The specific ambitious goal may "change several times during a lifetime" (NHG 25) without affecting the intensity and compulsiveness of the drive itself. The destructive nature of neurotic ambition is well summed up by Browning's Paracelsus, who contrasts life before his search for glory was established with life after it turned him into a person driven by the "wolfish hunger after knowledge" (2.124) which defines his particular neurotic ambition. Since his search began, he says,

> I have made life consist of one idea:
> Ere that was master, up till that was born,
> I bear a memory of a pleasant life
> Whose small events I treasure; till one morn
> I ran o'er the seven little grassy fields,
> Startling the flocks of nameless birds, to tell
> Poor Festus, leaping all the while for joy,
> To leave all trouble for my future plans,
> Since I had just determined to become
> The greatest and most glorious man on earth.
> And since that morn all life has been forgotten;
> All is one day, one only step between
> The outset and the end: one tyrant all-
> Absorbing aim fills up the interspace. . . .
> (2.140-53)

Though Paracelsus's description of his neurotic ambition as having come over him all at once is realistic only insofar as it reveals his tendency to see himself as the recipient of stunning, spectacular experiences, his insight into the effects of having "one tyrant all- / Absorbing aim" is quite clear at this point.

Equally clear, however, is the fact that, as Horney would predict, Paracelsus's self-idealization usually transforms his "master" and "tyrant," neurotic ambition, into something else befitting "The greatest and most glorious man on earth": it is "God's great commission" (1.143); it is "The path which God's will seems to authorize" (1.173), "a true fire" that has always felt more as if "an angel ruled" him than as if his "soul's own workings, own high nature, / So became manifest" (1.426, 430-32). Seeing his ambition as the expression of his "soul" is of course quite a bit finer than it would be to see it as the expression of his idealized self, which Paracelsus (like Andrea, Cleon, and other Browning monologuists) is pleased to think of as his soul. The sense of election that we have seen in Browning speakers like Johannes Agricola is a more specific example of

the theologizing of psychic experience that produces this identification of the idealized self with the soul, an identification that goes far to explain the religious fervor--or, one might say, the neurotic intensity--with which many Browning speakers pursue and talk about the fulfillment of their neurotic ambitions as though it were salvation.

A second component that Horney finds in every "search for glory . . . is the drive toward a vindictive triumph" (NHG 26) over others. It aims "to shame or defeat" others, to make them suffer, "to frustrate" them--always as "revenge for humiliations suffered in childhood" and for "accretions" to those humiliations encountered in later life (NHG 27). According to Horney, this drive is usually unconscious and often is "absorb[ed]" into neurotic ambition (NHG 27-28). It should be distinguished, I think, from the vengefulness arising mainly from a particular insult or injury to the grandiose self-conception of a character like Browning's Duke. In the case of a character like Mr. Sludge, however, a long history of relative deprivation and class-related humiliations obviously contributes, from underlying levels, an added force to his drive to take revenge on Horsefall. It is useful to think of the drive for vindictive triumph as coming from such a reservoir of vengeful feelings that predispose a person to react to any injury more strongly than might be expected.

The final major drive powering the search for glory--"the need for perfection"--"aims at nothing less than molding the whole personality into the idealized self" (NHG 24-25). This drive spawns a set of "inner dictates" ("compris[ing] all that the neurotic should be able

to do, to be, to feel, to know") and "taboos" (comprising all that the person "should not be") that control and monitor every aspect of behavior and psychological functioning (NHG 65). Since these inner dictates (or "shoulds" [NHG 65]) and taboos are, as it were, detailed specifications and instructions for building the idealized self, the person's moment-by-moment thoughts, feelings, and actions manifest their content; observing these manifestations may therefore allow us to infer with considerable precision that image of perfection, often more hidden, toward which the personality is compulsively striving.

Though some of a person's inner dictates and taboos may seem reasonable at first glance, they are as unrealistic as the idealized self; and though some of them may resemble "real moral standards or ideals," they are actually "permeated by the spirit of arrogance," for they "aim at enhancing the neurotic's glory and at making him godlike" (NHG 72-73). Because the need to live up to them is a transformation of the person's great need to be his or her idealized self, they are so "coercive" that "violent emotional reactions"--"anxiety," self-hate, and other inner disturbances--automatically follow any infraction of them (NHG 73-74). Because they incorporate both the person's dominant and subordinate trends (NHG 22), they may produce "conflicting inner dictates" that can paralyze a person or cause him or her to react, in despair, with wildly escapist, self-destructive behavior (NHG 75). Altogether, the inner dictates and taboos, as built-in enforcers of the neurotic solution, subject the person to an inner dictatorship that Horney aptly terms "'the tyranny of the should'" (NHG 65). If actualization of the idealized self is theologized as salvation of the

soul, however, the shoulds and taboos may also be theologized and glorified as the doctrines of faith and conduct under which that salvation is to be attained.

The drives involved in the search for glory "all aim at the absolute, the unlimited, the infinite" (NHG 34); but someone caught up in this quest is always hampered by reality: the person's "actual being" falls short of the "godlike image" that (s)he is attempting to actualize; and the world fails to "treat him as though it found him godlike" (NHG 40). Horney identifies the imagination and neurotic claims as particularly prominent means through which the neurotic person attempts to deal with these "discrepancies" (NHG 41).

No matter how diligently a person pursues neurotic ambitions, seeks vindictive triumph, and follows the inner dictates and taboos, the self that actually is cannot become the idealized self, which is a vision of perfection so unrealistic that only a superhuman being could attain it. Yet for an individual compulsively engaging in a search for glory, to see the inevitable, permanent disparities between the actual and the idealized self is unbearably painful as well as threatening to the defense system. That is the reason for "the great and peculiar role imagination plays" in the search for glory (NHG 31). Placed "in the service of neurotic needs," it injects "fantastic elements" into "thinking," "observing, believing, and particularly feeling," causing "subtle and comprehensive distortions of reality" that the neurotic person is unconscious of having "fabricat[ed]" (NHG 31-33). Imagination, having "produced" the idealized self, works continually to help fill the gap between it and the actual self, transforming "needs

into virtues or into more than justified expectations" (called claims); "intentions" into realities; "potentialities . . . into factual achievements"; and knowledge about "moral values" into practice of them. It works to wipe out any "disturbing evidence" that, for example, the person has not lived up to the demands of the inner dictates and taboos, and it also works to manufacture the attitudes and feelings that the inner dictates and taboos call for (NHG 33-34).

The imagination thus tends to impose consistency upon all experience--not consistency with reality, but consistency with the defense system of the imaginer. The implication is that even though the objective truth value of what a neurotic person says must always be indeterminate in the absence of other sources of information, whatever (s)he says must always at least reveal information about the design of the defense system, must tell us truths about the inner world of the speaker--truths we may meaningfully analyze within the framework of a psychological theory that deals with that kind of world. By extension, the psychological interpretation of dramatic monologues, speeches lacking contexts independent of the speakers, becomes epistemologically viable not in spite of but in part because of the role of the speakers' imaginations in shaping their utterances.

Whereas the imagination is a broad-spectrum remedy for dissonances between reality and a person's idealized self, neurotic claims are a specific for dissonances between the way external reality treats him or her and the way the person-as-idealized self feels (s)he should be treated. A claim, Horney explains, is really "a wish or need" that the person transforms into a demand or expectation that

(s)he feels entitled to have honored (NHG 42). Thus, operating under the terms of these claims, the person generally "feels entitled to special attention, consideration, [and] deference" and in addition claims that the world "ought to" fulfill "all [the] needs" generated by his or her "inhibitions, . . . fears, . . . conflicts, and . . . solutions"; that nothing (s)he "feels, thinks, or does ought . . . to carry any adverse consequences"; and that (s)he should be the exception to all "psychic laws" (NHG 41). Seen from this analytic perspective, claims are obviously "irrational because they assume a right, a title, which in reality does not exist" (NHG 42).

Claims must be seen from the point of view of the claimant if we are to understand the depth of passion attached to them. Claims emanate, we must remember, not from a person's actual self, but from the idealized self. To hold and assert claims, whatever their content may be, is in itself an act resembling a magical rite in which the celebrant, by assuming the appearance and behavior of a powerful deity, reverently snatches the subjective reality of that power for himself or herself by "becoming" the deity. Making claims as though one were the idealized self is thus a form of magical self-valorization that is psychically rewarding in itself, even independent of any results observable in the response of external reality to the claims asserted. The very activity of claiming heightens a desired feeling state, so that claiming becomes self-reinforcing. It creates a "private world . . . in which the neurotic feels entitled to everything" (NHG 59) and enjoys a "feeling of godlikeness" and "omnipotence" (NHG 46). "If he wishes hard enough," the person believes, "what he wishes will come

true. If he insists hard enough that things go his way, they will" (NHG 61).

All claims are therefore "pervaded by expectations of magic"; and these expectations, even if they are not fulfilled in the present, are still "indispensable" because making them maintains the person's "illusions about himself" (NHG 62-63). By reinforcing the inner world of identification with the idealized self, the claims allow the person to see any present failures of the claims not as "evidence against his unlimited possibilities," but simply as evidence "that, as yet, he has had an unfair deal" (NHG 62). They remain "his guaranty for future glory" (NHG 62).

None of this is to say, however, that the claimant does not care whether his or her claims are honored now. In fact, the person "build[s] up in his mind an airtight case" for their rightness and inflates the personal "merits," "superiority," "helplessness," or other qualities upon which (s)he founds this case (NHG 52-53). When the claims are not honored, "anger or even rage" follows (NHG 55). Because the person is convinced, if no one else is, that the claims are "fair and just," this rage feels like "righteous indignation," and (s)he "feels abused" (NHG 55-56). Such rage reactions "may be suppressed," turned into "self-pity," or transformed into a source of "chronic discontent"; but an "openly vindictive . . . person" is "prone . . . to take vengeance," and one who is also "openly arrogant" will feel (s)he is "doling out . . . justice" by doing so (NHG 56-57).

Horney's account of the nature and operation of claims seems generally quite relevant to Browning's speakers, whose identification

with the "grandiose" idealized self (NHG 41) is expressed in their fantasies and feelings of omnipotence and whose bitterness and vengefulness are aroused by denial of their grandiose claims. Since claims play a role in all defense systems, however, the precise significance of the monologuists' claims cannot be adequately understood until we examine Horney's treatment of narcissism as a specific neurotic solution.

As self-idealization and the search for glory draw a neurotic person farther and farther away not only from the real self but even from the actual self, the individual's self-evaluations, both positive and negative, become more and more centered upon the idealized self. This "transformation of values" evolves into a single dynamic "entity," comprising neurotic pride and self-hate, which Horney calls "the pride system" (NHG 110-11). Neurotic pride, qualitatively different from "healthy pride" in "substantial attributes" and real "achievements," may be attached to "prestige value," but more commonly is invested in the imagined "attributes . . . belonging to [the person's] idealized image," especially in those "infinite . . . powers of the mind" that manufacture the neurotic person's private world (NHG 88-91). Here we may think of the neurotic pride in his intelligence, craftiness, and imagination exhibited by Mr. Sludge, or the neurotic pride in his will power evidenced by the husband in "A Forgiveness." Neurotic "pride also is invested in faculties and prerogatives to which the neurotic feels entitled," for example in "invulnerability," as in the Duke's case, or in "good luck," as we see in Bishop Blougram or Sludge (NHG 92), or, I would add, in election, as shown in Johannes Agricola, for

example. Getting others to honor the claims feeds neurotic pride, as does "measuring up to [one's] inner dictates"--or rather, imagining that one does (NHG 92).

Because its basis is illusory, neurotic pride is easily injured by any reality that penetrates the person's defenses. Hurt pride causes "shame," when the injury comes from what the person perceives as his or her own failure, or "humiliation," when the person feels the injury as coming from outside (NHG 95). Which one (s)he feels depends upon the person's investments of pride as well as upon the circumstances (NHG 96-97). Someone like Browning's Cristina, for example, who prides herself on being strong and ruthless, feels shame at her moment of hesitation at having Monaldeschi killed (109-10); and someone like Sludge feels humiliated at being caught cheating, since he prides himself on being cleverer than anyone else, but not ashamed, since cheating feeds his pride in being the exception to all moral conventions. Hurt pride may be "consciously felt" only as "rage" or "fear" (NHG 99) that the idealized self has been threatened (NHG 102).

The threat that hurt pride represents to the neurotic person's equilibrium is so great that the defense system always includes "automatic endeavors to restore pride when it is hurt and to avoid injuries when it is endangered" (NHG 103). Getting revenge can restore pride not just because it means "'getting even,'" but because it means "triumphing by hitting back harder" (NHG 103). Often "the power to retaliate" is "invested with pride" (NHG 103), as in the case of the husband in "A Forgiveness," who takes pride in the power his position gives him to decide whether others will live or die. Another

common way of restoring neurotic pride "is losing interest in all situations or people who in some way hurt this pride" (NHG 104). If an "embarrassing incident" hurts someone's pride, (s)he may revise it imaginatively through "denials" or "distortions," as Sludge is already doing at the end of his monologue, or may make "excuses and alibis" to "erase" the "failing" (NHG 105), as Andrea does with respect to his parents' having died in poverty. Avoiding injuries to neurotic pride involves seeking "safety through restricting one's life" (NHG 108), another of Andrea's favorite moves. He avoids going out because he might meet "the Paris lords" (145-46), who might remind him that he misappropriated King Francis's money; and he avoids making Lucrezia choose between staying with him and going out to meet her lover because she could more seriously injure his pride by openly choosing the lover against his wishes than she does by leaving with his permission. By unconsciously restricting the feelings he says he would need to have in order to produce great paintings, he excuses himself from competition and thus the possibility of failure. The attempt to protect his neurotic pride has turned Andrea's life into an endless round of production work--which he can "Do easily, . . . perfectly" (63), without failure--and fantasies of past and future glory through which he nurses his belief that under different conditions, he has been his idealized self and could be again, if he chose.

The extreme measures that people take to restore neurotic pride and to avoid injuries to it in the future indicate the potency of self-hate, the other component of the pride system. Whenever neurotic pride cannot be immediately restored after an injury, the person is

attacked by self-hate--a savage, usually unconscious hate for the actual self and at a "deeper" level, for the real self (NHG 112). Self-hate is often "externalized," that is, "experienced as operating not within the individual . . . but between him and the outside world" (NHG 116). In active externalization, the person "direct[s] self-hate outward, against life, fate, institutions, or people," whereas in "passive externalization" the person feels hated by others (NHG 116).

Self-hate that is not dealt with by externalization expresses itself in a number of ways. It makes the inner dictates more "coercive" so that they punish the person for failure to be the idealized self (NHG 118), with the result that (s)he often unconsciously avoids seeing the failure (NHG 123). When the person does realize such a failure, (s)he may accuse himself or herself of being "a fraud" or of having bad "motivations" or of failing to control uncontrollable factors (NHG 123-27). This apparently conscientious self-scrutiny is actually inimical to true conscience because it emanates from neurotic pride in the idealized self (NHG 131-32).

Self-hate may also take the form of "self-contempt," which attacks "any striving for improvement or achievement" (NHG 132). Often externalized, self-contempt may cause the person to assume that others' "criticism" or even "positive feelings" reveal their secret contempt for him or her (NHG 134-35). The need for a defense against self-contempt also frequently leads to a "compulsive" search for others' "attention, regard, appreciation, admiration, or love," so that the person becomes completely "dependen[t] on others for self-evaluation" (NHG 136-37). Self-hate in the form of "self-torture" may sometimes be

actively externalized as "sadistic impulses--or actions--toward others" or passively externalized to produce "fears of torture"; or it may express itself in "direct self-destructive impulses and actions," including repeated patterns of behavior that provoke others to punish the person (NHG 145-52). All forms of self-hate fuel the person's efforts to protect neurotic pride, with the end result being ever-deeper entrenchment of the idealized self and ever-growing alienation from the constructive forces of the real self.

With these common components of adult neurotic psychic structure in mind, we can differentiate the major solutions that may evolve from an individual's idealization of the dominant interpersonal defense. The word "evolve" should be emphasized at this point: whereas the individual's early solution is primarily interpersonal, it has been "modified" in the adult "by the accretions acquired through the years from the intrapsychic processes" that develop from self-idealization; thus the major adult solution is "different in [its] structure" from the person's early one, for the adult version is "principally" a solution "for . . . intrapsychic conflicts" (NHG 297). A brief description of all the major solutions will complete our survey of Horney's theory and prepare for a more detailed examination of narcissism as she and Muriel Ivimey understand it.

The expansive solutions, all of which evolve from the defense of moving against people, emphasize "mastery" over "fate," over all circumstances, over all "intellectual problems," over others, and over inner "conflicts." "Helplessness" and "criticism and failure" are the expansive person's greatest enemies, and (s)he particularly hates the

"suppressed" self-effacing side, which is associated with moving toward people (NHG 192-93). Horney distinguishes "three subdivisions of the 'expansive type': the narcissistic, the perfectionistic, and the arrogant-vindictive type" (NHG 193).

The narcissistic person identifies with the "idealized self and seems to adore it," apparently having an "unquestioned belief in his greatness and uniqueness" (NHG 194). This type enjoys exhibiting and talking about his or her "gifts" and achievements and relates to others with "charm" and often with "generous" behavior, claiming in return "endless confirmation" of the idealized self "in the form of admiration and devotion" (NHG 194). (S)he very frequently relies on imagination "to deal with" the inner dictates' demands upon the self; but the person's claims upon others for "every privilege" are enormous, and those who question or "expect something of" the person "arouse a smoldering resentment" that may "explode in a burst of rage" (NHG 195). Narcissistic people, as a friend of mine puts it, "spread themselves large"; and they feel entitled to an admiring audience to applaud as they do it.

The perfectionistic person "identifies . . . with his standards," which are the basis of feelings of superiority. In return for "strenuous efforts" to fulfill the inner dictates, which call for "flawless excellence of the whole conduct of life," the person "needs respect from others" and claims "fair treatment"; thus (s)he expects to exchange "perfection" for "control [over] life." As a consequence of this "'deal,'" the defense system of a perfectionistic person is extremely vulnerable to undeserved ill fortune (which should not be

possible, according to the bargain) and to any "realization of his own fallibility" (NHG 196-97).

In the arrogant-vindictive person, the drive for vindictive triumph is "a way of life" (NHG 197). This person "is identified with his pride" (NHG 197): "pride in a godlike self-sufficiency," "in . . . intellectual powers" such as "vigilance," "foresight," and wiliness, "in inviolability" and "invulnerability," "in immunity and impunity," and in the "honesty, . . . fairness, and . . . justice" of his or her dealings with what (s)he sees as a "crooked and hostile world" (NHG 204-06). Having as nearly as possible eliminated "all tender needs," the arrogant-vindictive person cares nothing about "pleas[ing]" others (NHG 202-03). (S)he only claims things from them: a right to ignore them and their interests without their responding in kind (NHG 200); a right to take revenge for their offenses (NHG 201); and a right to have them refrain from "arous[ing] in him any guilt feelings or any self-doubts," for such a person relies on "an armor of self-righteousness" for protection from self-hate (NHG 208-09).

Horney summarizes the aims of the expansive types--narcissistic, perfectionistic, and arrogant-vindictive--as follows:

> They try to achieve . . . mastery in different ways: by self-admiration and the exercise of charm; by compelling fate through the height of their standards; by being invincible and conquering life in the spirit of a vindictive triumph. (NHG 212)

All of the expansive types, however, want "to manipulate or dominate others and to make [others] dependent upon" them (NHG 214).

By contrast, the self-effacing solution, evolved from the defense of moving toward people, emphasizes winning others' "love and

protection" (NHG 222). A self-effacing person has strict taboos on acting out or even consciously experiencing "expansive feelings . . . such as . . . pride," "triumph," "superiority," "ambition," and the like, instead seeking dependence on others and wishing "to appease" rather than to master them (NHG 215-16). In contrast to the expansive person, who can counter self-hate by such means as taking pride-restoring revenge, the self-effacing person is far more of "a helpless prey to self-hate" and therefore consciously feels "guilty, unwanted, unlovable, stupid, incompetent," and "helpless" (NHG 223)--feelings reinforced by the tendency to handle self-hate by passive externalization. No wonder the person desperately needs others' sheltering love--and therefore claims it (NHG 226, 228). The claims are based mainly on the person's secretly beloved idealized self, which emphasizes "'lovable' qualities, such as unselfishness, goodness, generosity, humility, saintliness, nobility, sympathy," and "deep feelings"; "helplessness, suffering, and martyrdom are . . . secondarily glorified" (NHG 222), for they constitute another basis for the person's claim that others should supply help and love (NHG 229-30), and they provide "an outlet for the suppressed expansive drives" by making the person "feel secretly superior" and by allowing him or her to "mak[e] others feel guilty" (a kind of revenge) while (s)he "save[s] . . . face" for any lack of success (NHG 231-33, 235).

The self-effacing person is particularly vulnerable to a destructive type of relationship that Horney terms "morbid dependency." In such a relationship, the person's search for "salvation" in love leads him or her to become "'spellbound'" by

someone who seems "stronger and superior" (NHG 240-41, 243). The self-effacing person's suppressed expansive side can be experienced "vicariously" through merger with this proud other (NHG 244). Once involved in such an attachment, however, the self-effacing partner is absorbed by it; and, given the proud partner's frequent tendency to feel smothered by it and therefore to mistreat and "frustrat[e]" the self-effacing partner (NHG 247-50), the outcome is usually destructive to the latter. Altogether, a number of factors--for example, the self-effacing person's inability to experience consciously even real achievements (NHG 217), his or her extreme vulnerability to self-hate, and the fatal attraction to relationships involving morbid dependency--combine to make this solution "the least satisfactory one" (NHG 239).

The last major solution, resignation, represents a psychic "withdraw[al] from the inner battlefield" of expansive and self-effacing trends--a deactivation of both sides of the inner conflict and of the search for glory--by means of which the person, though maintaining the idealized self and the pride system, "tries to immobilize" the inner conflict by "giving up struggling and striving and settling for less" (NHG 259-60, 272). The person's expansive and self-effacing trends remain conscious, but become "more attitudes than active, powerful drives" (NHG 270, 272). The resigned solution centers on "freedom," conceived of as "doing what [one] likes" with "no interference by others" (NHG 274). The individual's idealized self reflects this value, emphasizing "self-sufficiency, independence, self-contained serenity, freedom from desires and passions, stoicism, and

fairness," with the last defined in terms "of not infringing upon anybody's rights" (NHG 277).

These idealized qualities are pursued through strategies of "restriction" and avoidance (NHG 260). The person always remains "an onlooker" (NHG 260); "unconsciously reject[ing] both achievement and effort," (s)he may experience "a complete inertia," doing whatever (s)he does "against inner resistance" (NHG 261-62). (S)he tries to avoid wishing for or "really needing" anything, "retract[s]" any wish or attachment that (s)he may develop, and carefully maintains "emotional distance from others" (NHG 263-64). Hating any "coercion" or "change," (s)he prefers "to regard things as unalterable" and thus to avoid being stirred up (NHG 266-68). The resigned person tends to rebel against the inner dictates (NHG 277-78) and, externalizing many of them, feels them as an "external coercion" to be met with "passive resistance" (NHG 278-79). The major claims associated with resignation "are that life should be easy, painless, and effortless" (for example, the person may claim "exempt[ion] from having to make a living and from responsibilities") and that others should respect his or her "privacy" and "not expect anything of him" (NHG 264, 271). All in all, the resigned type presents, in Horney's words, "a picture of great consistency and unity, looking as if it had been painted in one hue" (NHG 269); or as Browning's resigned Andrea del Sarto puts it, "A common greyness" (35) prevails, and

> the whole seems to fall into a shape
> As if I saw alike my work and self
> And all that I was born to be and do,
> A twilight-piece. (46-49)

We can readily see now that each adult solution is, as Horney puts it, "a compulsive way of living" (NHG 159). Each is organized around the pseudo-values (inner dictates and taboos) that the idealized self should exemplify and the pseudo-entitlements (claims) that the world should fulfill in homage to it; each is energized by the pride system, the false, neurotic pride and the self-hate which, with inexorable reciprocity, continually shore up and undermine the major solution, creating inner conflicts in the course of which secondary and repressed solutions and their concomitant shoulds and claims may assert themselves; and each is more or less successfully fictionalized by the imagination as it mends the conflict-riven psychic fabric as best it can, weaving the revisionist and compensatory fantasies that veil off the actual and real selves from the prudish eyes of the idealized self.

II

As we look back at the narcissistic solution in relation to the others, its contrasts with them emerge rather clearly. Horney's portrait of the narcissistic person suggests a generally exuberant, unrestrained quality not only very different from the "self-minimizing" quality of the self-effacing person (NHG 217) and the restricted quality of the resigned one, but also quite different from the qualities of the other two expansive types, the well-regulated perfectionistic person and the "scheming," calculating arrogant-vindictive person with his or her habitual "cautious prudence" and perpetual bookkeeping on "injuries received" (NHG 198-99, 201). The narcissist's identification with the idealized self, where "fantastically exaggerated" versions of "real attributes" are written

large, is practically unchecked by "rational judgment," for his or her imagination is especially unconfined, easily "enter[ing] into and tak[ing] for real the vastly more beautiful and wonderful self" that (s)he has created (Ivimey 14-15). Though all neurotic types have fantasies of omnipotence, the narcissist's "blind conviction of unlimited powers" (Ivimey 14) and "boundless pride" based on this "illusion of omnipotence" (Ivimey 18) seem closer to the surface and less inhibited than is the case in other types. His or her "buoyancy," "resiliency," and "seeming abundance of self-confidence" arise from this openly exhibited conviction that (s)he "is the anointed, the man of destiny, the prophet, the great giver, the benefactor of mankind" (NHG 194). Not merely self-satisfied (Fromm 70), the narcissist "is consciously infatuated with" the idealized self (Ivimey 13)--an infatuation often written on his or her face, Erich Fromm notes, as "a kind of glow or smile" suggesting "smugness" or "childlikeness" (70).

The impression of the adult narcissist as somehow childlike is strengthened by Horney's portrait of such a person as often "speak[ing] incessantly of his exploits" and "wonderful qualities" in the expectation of winning "endless confirmation . . . in the form of admiration and devotion" (NHG 194). The situation resembles that in which a child prattles to its caregivers about the day's fantasy adventures in the mode of Superman or Wonder Woman ("You did!" they cry in playful astonishment) or confides to an indulgent Festus its plan to be "The greatest and most glorious man on earth" (Browning, Paracelsus 2.149). The observation that the adult narcissist attempts "to master all inner and outer difficulties through" such fantasies (Ivimey 18)

further suggests that the narcissist's presentation of the idealized self involves a kind of magical view of the self similar to that often attributed by psychological theorists to infants and small children and, Sandor Ferenczi suggests, preserved in "the heroes of fairy-tales," who are "strong and unconquerable," "immortal," and of course, "magic" (238-39). Indeed, it is as though the idealized self of the adult narcissist were the hero or heroine of some such fairy story that tells and retells itself like an elaborate spell, working its magic on some or many listeners--as Horney's remark on the narcissist's often effective "exercise of charm" (NHG 212) implies--but on no one more effectively than on the tale's protagonist.

The narcissist's idealized self and search for glory have a vague, unfocused quality that again places this solution in contrast to the others. The greatness that (s)he attributes to the idealized self is relatively unspecialized: (s)he takes "pride . . . in 'effortless superiority'" exhibited in doing something; but though that something should be "dramatic" and "unusual" (NHG 314), it is otherwise ill defined. Visions of "quick and glamorous achievement" entice the person to chase glory from one activity to another, either attempting "too many simultaneous activities" or "successively starting and dropping one pursuit after the other"; but when (s)he encounters any "real difficulty" and unconsciously senses that (s)he will have to give up some enterprises or put in "consistent efforts" in order to succeed, (s)he suddenly loses interest rather than allow his or her "illusions of unlimited energies" and "unlimited powers" to be threatened by any such necessity (NHG 312-14).

The need to protect neurotic pride this way when it is threatened, supplemented by the possible long-term, retrospective defense that (s)he "would have accomplished something great" in past activities if (s)he "had put in real efforts" (NHG 314), makes it quite likely that almost every area of a narcissistic person's life--career, political or civic involvements, social life, family life--will be characterized by many grandiose plans for some kind of superstardom combined with relatively fluid, indiscriminate ideas about what kind of superstardom is to be sought next. Neither the perfectionistic person, who has a prideful selectiveness about ambitious goals and prideful scruples about the means to that righteous glory, nor the arrogant-vindictive person, who has a single-minded sense of purpose and "long-range . . . plans for vindictive triumph" (Ivimey 16), presents the picture of undifferentiated ambition that we see in the narcissistic type. Again, the adult narcissist rather resembles a child who in a single week may announce its ambitions to be a brain surgeon, a heroic police officer, Robin Hood (back in reruns), a professional athlete, and the President (or maybe a movie star). There is in the adult a grasping at images of omnipotence with the same

> feeling of obviousness with which [the child] stretches out its hand after all objects, after the lamp hanging above him as after the shining moon, in the sure expectation of reaching it with this gesture and drawing it into the domain of its power. . . . (Ferenczi 217)

The narcissist's inner dictates and claims and their strength relative to each other also distinguish this neurotic type from the others. The inner dictates center on never failing at and on continually reinforcing a commitment to being the idealized self; on

proving over and over the truth of the "conviction that there is nothing he cannot do and no one he cannot win" (NHG 194); and on "hold[ing] onto" his or her "dreams and . . . exaggerated claims" (Paris, "Bargains with Fate" 148). Other, more specific inner dictates seem to vary, and are usually quite weak: the person can "deal with them" easily by using imagination to "overlook flaws, or to turn them into virtues" or at worst, "amiable peculiarit[ies]" (NHG 195). The notion of having obligations to other people often does not seem to register with the narcissist (NHG 195; cf. Kernberg 215, 219). The major shoulds are thus aimed not at actualizing the idealized self, but at maintaining a sense of already being it--a version of the neurotic project that sets this type apart from all the others.

The narcissist's claims are also aimed at maintaining an identification with the idealized self. Though all expansive types need, and therefore claim, "boundless" "recognition" (NHG 311), this need is "compulsive" in the narcissistic person, far greater than that of the perfectionistic or arrogant-vindictive person: "He must have extravagant and unconditional admiration and endorsement, full measure and running over, constantly repeated" (Ivimey 15, 17). Ivimey compares the narcissist's need for confirmation to a drug addiction (15). Because this need is so great, the claim into which it is transformed--that others should give confirmation--is very strong. Pressing this claim requires, of course, that the claimer first exhibit the idealized self, and the narcissist typically does so, often being "charming," self-presenting as one who "'loves' people," praising his or her "family and . . . friends," sometimes being

"generous, with a scintillating display of feeling, with flattery, with favors and help"; yet all of this is done "in anticipation of admiration or in return for devotion received" (NHG 194). In fact, the narcissist is "at bottom unrelated to others" (NHG 195): (s)he "usually does not listen to what others say" and is not "really interested" in them "except as echoes of" the self (Fromm 70, 69). (S)he "cannot perceive the reality within another person as distinct from his own" (Fromm 68).

Ivimey's description of what the narcissistic patient wants from the analyst vividly details the nature of the confirmation that a narcissist claims from everyone. From the narcissist's viewpoint, the other person (here, the analyst) should offer "undivided attention, sympathy, appreciation," and "help" in the form of "a sort of supporting obbligato" while (s)he always holds "the center of the stage." (S)he expects "the analyst's attention" to "be fixed, fascinated and uncritical" and expects the analyst to respond with "abounding enthusiasm or sympathy" to "everything about" the patient: his or her "opinions, . . . accomplishments, . . . exploits, . . . ambitions." The analyst should always understand "how unjustly he is treated by those who don't adore him." Anything less than this unqualified confirmation from the analyst is a "disappointment" that the narcissist will attribute "to some deficiency" of the analyst (Ivimey 17). It is easy to see that the narcissistic person is a Browning character always claiming a monologue opportunity in which to display the idealized self and to have it confirmed as real.

Other typical claims of the narcissistic person are equally sweeping. People should never take issue with anything (s)he says or does; they should never "question his rights" to do as (s)he likes; they should always "'love' him 'unconditionally,' no matter how much he actually trespasses on their rights"; they should recognize at all times "that his needs or his tasks are so important that they entitle him to every privilege" (NHG 195). Like the other expansive types, the narcissist claims others' praise of his or her work, but does so "in a [more] flagrant manner" (NHG 311-12).

Beyond this expectation, which Fromm associates with a relatively "benign narcissism" because at least work requires the person "to be related to reality," there may be claims based "not [on] anything the person does or produces, but [on] something he has" (77) or on "everything connected with him" (71). For example, a narcissist may base claims on physical appearance, or on family background (Browning's speakers who are of noble birth would be excellent examples), or on any number of other things which, though simply accidental, imply to the narcissist that his or her mere being confers entitlement to all manner of admiration and special treatment. Similarly, (s)he may make some or all of his or her possessions or personal connections--a sexual partner or children, for example--into "objects of his narcissistic attachment" (Fromm 71) and then claim others' praise of them. Altogether, the narcissist's shoulds, compared to those of the other neurotic types, exert the fewest and weakest specific demands to make the self into the idealized self, but place him or her under immense pressure to fulfill a single, all-

inclusive demand: "Keep on being your idealized self." Thus the idealized self in a sense is also the person's One Great Should.

The narcissist's One Great Claim--for continual, unqualified, overwhelming confirmation, from absolutely everyone else, that (s)he is indeed the idealized self--combines with the tendency of these peculiar shoulds to make this person less able than other neurotics to feel satisfaction at having fulfilled some inner dictate whether everyone else knows it or not. All neurotic solutions make others "overimportant" to the neurotic (NHG 297), but solutions other than narcissism offer more loopholes that allow the person to feel, without the mediation of others' confirmation, that (s)he has fulfilled an important should. A perfectionistic person, for example, does not need confirmation of his or her moral rectitude from people who are, (s)he thinks, unprincipled; their failure to give confirmation, since it proves his or her moral superiority, may add to the satisfaction of having done what (s)he knows was right. An arrogant-vindictive person wants vindictive triumph in the end, but the inner dictate that (s)he should be able to fool anybody will be satisfied if everyone takes the plotter for a harmless soul in the meantime. A resigned person would rather not be surrounded by a circle of admirers who cry out rapturously, "Oh, it's so wonderful to see how you never wish for anything much! You're so--so free!" (S)he would feel pressured by their adulation and fettered by their understanding. Even a self-effacing person, whose need for others is as strong as the narcissist's, need not have everyone confirm his or her fulfillment of the shoulds so long as someone does so by providing the protective

"love" that (s)he needs; and short of this most desired outcome, the person may still get considerable interim satisfaction from feeling that (s)he has fulfilled some inner dictate--for example, by helping someone--even if the beneficiary did not seem adequately appreciative. At least the self-effacing person has added a star to his or her crown of martyrdom, and besides, some day the ingrate may notice and reward the helper's faithfulness.

In contrast to the other types, a narcissist can seldom gain self-reinforcement from fulfilling some inner dictate. Others must notice, for successfully pressing the One Great Claim of confirmation is the main test of whether (s)he is fulfilling the One Great Should. In addition, the narcissist's need for constant confirmation means that (s)he lacks such capacity as the other types have to wait for it; and the need for confirmation from everyone means that (s)he cannot get along on confirmation from a more select group of others. This intolerance for dissenters in turn accounts for the fact that the narcissist "often has to change his friends" (Ivimey 16), moving on "to others who 'understand' him better"--a necessity that causes him or her "often" to be "lonely" (NHG 195) and therefore much in need of new others. All of these factors make the narcissistic person more continually dependent upon others than is any other neurotic type.

This profound dependence on others, who must cooperate if the narcissist is to fulfill the inner dictates and successfully present the Great Claim, has several major implications for our understanding of this neurotic solution. First, it suggests that these elements of the narcissist's inner constellation might well be interpreted in terms

of structural immaturity. The weak specific shoulds, so easily overcome by impulse or imagination, resemble the specific rules that grown-ups have tried to impress upon a little child only to have the child "forget" them under the pressure of an attractive temptation. The adult narcissist's shoulds have of course been transformed by internalization, maturation, and environmental changes; but even so, the unreliability of specific inner dictates may still result in his or her requiring others' surveillance as a reminder of whatever particular standards of behavior (s)he may have acquired.

This deficiency in self-monitoring is the quality Erickson seems to be getting at when he describes Browning's typical "prideful" monologuist as one whose "underdeveloped self-consciousness" requires that (s)he "see himself and his actions through another's eyes" in order to refrain from "act[ing] . . . as if exempt from all laws and moral restrictions" (160-61). Insofar as his or her moral awareness is largely a matter of awareness of others' approval or disapproval of certain behavior, the narcissist tends to forget the rules easily when others do not seem to be looking and, claiming exemption based on specialness, rather easily sweeps aside any adverse evaluations others make when it turns out they were looking after all.

The more striking resemblance between the child and the adult narcissist is between the task of socialization as the child understands it--"Be what the grown-ups want"--and the task set by the narcissist's internalized Great Should--"Keep on being your idealized self." The missing link between the two, the message that might transform the child's task into the adult's neurotic project, would

say, "You are what the others want you to be; it's wonderful; keep up the fabulous work." This transforming message would account for what Paris sees as the adult narcissist's project: to preserve or hold on to the idealized image that others conferred upon him or her in childhood by turning it into the idealized self and maintaining an identification with it.

This sketch of the narcissist's early development, to be taken up in more detail later when we examine the origin of narcissism, implies that the adult narcissist's unusual dependence results in part from the common source of the idealized self and the Great Should in other people, who transmit these elements to the child from outside. These elements in the other Horneyan solutions, though also arising from and continually modified by the nature of the child's interpersonal relationships, are by comparison more self-generated in that the child itself unconsciously glorifies its dominant defense, creates its own idealized image, and develops its own inner dictates. I think this is why the adult version of the narcissistic solution seems to retain more of the interpersonal orientation which, according to Horney, dominates all of the early solutions but which is transformed--more completely in the other solutions, I suspect--into a "different . . . structure" primarily oriented toward "intrapsychic conflicts" (NHG 297). The narcissistic solution, in other words, may have a more archaic structure than the others have.

If the narcissist's solution is less self-generated than the others, and thus less grounded in the early experience of conflict between compulsive moves toward, against, and away from others, we

might be able to account for two further peculiarities of narcissistic character structure. The first is that unlike other neurotic types, in whom the most evident inner conflict occurs between self-effacing and expansive trends (NHG 112), the narcissist's most prominent conflict is between the idealized and the real self, so that narcissistic self-hate is mainly expressed as "the rejection and condemnation of the real self" (Ivimey 15). Though the narcissist, like other expansive types, always has suppressed self-effacing trends (NHG 192), their conflict with the dominant expansive trends receives comparatively little emphasis in either Horney's or Ivimey's examination of narcissism.

In addition to accounting for the unusual prominence of hatred for the real self in the narcissistic solution, we might be able to suggest how it happens that, according to Ivimey, there is a significant subgroup of "essentially narcissistic" people who appear at first to be self-effacing because their self-idealization emphasizes "compliancy character traits" (16). The other major subgroup of course includes people in whom "aggressive traits are . . . in the foreground" (Ivimey 16), and I suspect the existence of a third subgroup, probably smaller than the other two, consisting of people with narcissistic character structures and idealized selves emphasizing resigned attitudes and traits. Such a person would resemble Browning's Cleon.

The narcissist's having had the idealized self conferred in childhood helps us to understand both of these anomalies. It means that the important others around the child not only held up their image of what (s)he should be, but actually thrust it into the child's psychic life, perhaps at a very early stage in the self-alienating

process that ordinarily transforms conflict among the various interpersonal defenses into self-idealization and intrapsychic conflict. The child's real self might still have been sufficiently robust at that stage to have confronted the intervening idealized self rather directly. Under such circumstances, it seems to me, the stark contrast between the real self and the intruding idealized image might be highlighted, making the child unusually vulnerable to hatred for the real self, while the conflict between expansive and self-effacing trends might move into the background or perhaps even fail to develop the clear-cut, intense quality it has in the other types.

The outside source of the narcissist's idealized self would also explain why traits associated with other solutions can appear there: whatever traits are part of the image that the child's important others impose will likely become part of the idealized self with which the child needs to identify in order to assure confirmation. That these traits may be contradictory to the grandiose, expansive structure of the adult narcissist's personality is thus not puzzling after all, for it simply means that when (s)he was little, the big people let him or her know that they wanted to see these traits. Fromm notes, for example, that for a narcissist to admire his or her own "humility" is "not rare" (70). I suspect that when such a person acted humble as a child, the adults praised him or her for being absolutely the most wonderfully humble child in the world, thus reinforcing exhibitions of humility and teaching the child that if you are really humble, you can master the big people every time.

Enough childhood experiences along these lines, it is easy to see, could produce the sort of adult that Ivimey would classify among the compliant narcissists, who exhibit "superficial characteristics" of "gentleness, charm, diffidence, helpfulness, deference, harmlessness," and the like, who seem to think of others more than of themselves, and who seem interested in "closeness and intimacy" (Ivimey 16). But such people are really interested in "admiring themselves" and being admired in this role (Fromm 69-70). The compliant narcissist's idealized self features "compliancy traits," but unlike the self-effacing person, (s)he "operates in identification with" it (Ivimey 16). When the surface is scratched, the compliant narcissist shows "colossal vanity, exorbitant claims," "frank exploitiveness," and--when compliant traits do not lead to the desired confirmation--"round-about" expressions of anger and vindictiveness (Ivimey 16). From this kind of contradictory picture, we can see that the narcissist's development has the potential to produce an unusually mixed set of observable traits that need not be so much the signal of deep, chronic intrapsychic conflict between contradictory inner dictates as they are the signal of the assortment of externally oriented behaviors prescribed in whatever image the adults in the early environment manufactured for the child to become.

III

The most important consequence of the narcissist's profound dependence on others is that, despite a "seeming abundance of self-confidence" (NHG 194), (s)he always suffers an equally profound insecurity. The sources of this insecurity are so entwined with the total development of the narcissist and its impact on his or her way

of being is so pervasive and powerful that we must explore its origins and consequences in some detail if we are to move toward the heart of this person's experience.

We must first understand that the narcissistic person's insecurity does not necessarily result from lack of actual qualities that might win others' honest praise. On the contrary, both Horney and Ivimey make comments suggesting that the narcissist's possession of such qualities may well have contributed to the development of this neurotic solution. Horney remarks that the narcissist "often is gifted beyond average, early and easily won distinctions, and sometimes was the favored and admired child" (NHG 194), and Ivimey observes that the narcissistic patient frequently does have vitality and "good looks," high "intelligence," many achievements, a family "and many friends," and the like (17). The problem is that receiving "matter-of-fact credit" for such genuine qualities and achievements seems to the narcissist "quite insufficient," and indeed may irritate him or her (Ivimey 17). The narcissist needs (and therefore claims) far more than reality-based, adult-to-adult compliments, for these will seldom offer the extravaganza of superlatives that (s)he is always waiting for. The reason for this insecure expectancy, I suspect, is often to be found in the childhood conditions Horney mentions: the existence in the child of above-average qualities of some sort; and the tendency of others to respond to these qualities with "blind adoration" that "inflate[s]" the child's "feeling of significance" (NHG 87).

Since these two conditions can be met rather easily, many more narcissists than one might expect may be waiting for--indeed

demanding--others' cooperation (or complicity) in the project of re-creating, over and over again, the performer-adoring audience relationship that supported the narcissist's childhood self-evaluation. Many environments allow limited opportunities to compare some quality of the child's--say, a musical talent--with that quality as it may exist in a range of other children. Given a small enough pond, a child with some real talent may be adulated as a prodigy and may eventually invest a great deal of pride in the musical talent, to a large degree "identif[ying]" the self "with [that] partial aspect of" the self, as Fromm says the narcissist often does (71).

Later, in a much larger pond--say, a prestigious conservatory--(s)he may find that it will no longer be easy to gain adulation, given a new, higher standard of excellence and intense competition with others of equal or greater ability. Here the young musician may first encounter an insecurity that Alice Miller finds in the person who has identified with certain "qualities" and with "success and achievements." This identification compounds his or her "torturing dependence" on others' "admiration" by making "self-respect" also "dependent on qualities, functions, and achievements that can suddenly fail" (38, 42)--or seem to fail, if the person defines success as nothing less than overwhelming confirmation. Thus, even if (s)he does not actually fail, the young musician may be at risk of leaving the conservatory, for as Miller says, the narcissist "must excel brilliantly in" what (s)he does and may "not attempt" anything if (s)he cannot do that (38).

If the musician should persist, however, (s)he is still likely to encounter another source of the narcissist's insecurity. As Otto F. Kernberg points out, in "an ordinary life span most narcissistic gratifications occur in adolescence and early adulthood" (238), so that the adult musician may later be hard pressed to find the continual confirmation that (s)he still needs when (s)he can no longer be defined as a prodigy. At any of several critical points, then, the narcissistic musician of above-average gifts may be paralyzed by an insecurity bred in the early, abundant confirmation that inflated his or her self-estimate while it caused dependence on a level of confirmation that would become more and more difficult to attain.

If it is rather easy for a child with some real talent to be overvalued, it is easier yet for a socioeconomically privileged child, talented or not, to derive from the environment a conviction of magic specialness. This conviction may be less vulnerable than is its counterpart in the talented child, for it is less subject to the threats of competition and failure, provided the society is well engineered to prevent downward mobility among the privileged. Yet the rich child's dependence upon position and the world's homage to it may lead to insecurity as profound as that of the child who relies on talent to gain confirmation.

Robert Coles's account of the privileged child's development and display of a special brand of "narcissistic entitlement" (366), though based on his study of contemporary American children, is I think most suggestive as a basis for understanding this narcissistic phenomenon as it occurs in other societies like ours. In such societies a ruling

class, motivated primarily by their desire to preserve the privileges upon which their identities are quite dependent, perpetuate their dominance by psychological means. They cannot directly control all future conditions; but they can replicate in their children self-conceptions and psychodynamics that will enable the next generation to pursue their class interests under the conviction that they are entitled to do so. Their sense of entitlement will be projected into economic and social policy making and split off, to remain unowned by its elite sources and to be naively reified as the impersonal "economic forces" and "social forces" of materialist analyses.

The child imbued with this sense of narcissistic entitlement often strikes the observer, Coles finds, as "a smug, self-satisfied," "self-centered child" (364) who feels that "abundance is his destiny" (374), "but wants and expects more" and "yet more: an inheritance the world is expected to provide" through the parents (366). Perhaps recalling Sigmund Freud's characterization of the overvaluated child as "'His Majesty the Baby'" (91), Coles remarks that the rich child often seems to be "sitting on a throne of sorts," apparently "taking <u>too</u> much for granted" by "'thinking that everything is coming to'" him or her (367-68). There are few limits on what the child can have, as (s)he learns from repeated experiences of having "one day's apparently fatuous, excessive fantasy . . . turn into the next day's actuality" (Coles 376). For such a child, who sees by looking at the life of the surrounding adults that these pleasant conditions are surely going to continue, narcissistic claims really are justifiable expectations; or as Coles puts it, "entitlement" is a "social fact" (363).

Most parents of rich children do, however, confer upon them the elements of an idealized image--elements summed up in a phrase used by one of Coles's informants: "'the responsibilities of entitlement'" (363). These responsibilities may sometimes resemble perfectionistic shoulds (see 404-05 for examples), but the assumption behind them--that one must fulfill them in order to keep one's high position--marks them as means of holding on to identification with the idealized self, which is the narcissist's project. The fundamental notion seems to be that the rich child can and does carry out these responsibilities because (s)he is so special (Coles 406). The foremost one, certainly, is supremely narcissistic: the child should focus on "the 'self'--its display, its possibilities, its cultivation and development" (Coles 381). The rich child is "taught to use" mirrors at an unusually early age (Coles 380) and receives potent reinforcement of his or her appearance and accomplishments, as for example in the case of a girl whose parents had many pictures of her hanging and sitting about the house, even in her room (Coles 385). Possessions function as a reflection, "support," and "sanctuary" for the self; as the same girl told Coles, what "'belongs to you, that's yours, that's you'" (391).

Obligations to others are also conceived narcissistically, as an extension of the self to others. As a "patrician Yankee" child remarked to Coles, echoing his father, "'first you build yourself up. You learn all you can. Later, you can give of yourself'" (381-82). Such parental dicta no doubt go far to produce the sort of narcissistic adult whose idealized self is "the great giver, the benefactor of mankind" (NHG 194). Limiting the self and considering others is

"voluntary" for the rich child (Coles 369); doing so, as the concept of noblesse oblige suggests (Coles 368), magically preserves the superiority of the idealized self. The primarily narcissistic emphasis of noblesse oblige is nicely summed up by one of Coles's young informants as she speaks of her "'oddball'" cousin (Coles 394) who sometimes comes to visit:

> "We can't laugh. That would be bad. You should feel sorry for people who aren't as fortunate as you are. If you don't, then you are rude and you don't have charity. If you're not nice to someone, you've lost. You sink down to the other person's level." (Coles 394)

One can see how well this little speaker has internalized her "'fortunate'" status--the idealized image conferred upon her by those surrounding her--and how carefully she has been taught certain compliant values which she can put in the service of maintaining identification with her narcissistic idealized self.

With an almost unlimited future so obviously assured in a society structured to honor the child's sense of entitlement, and with a version of his or her obligations so splendidly designed to guarantee that fulfilling them will be rather easy and will feed narcissistic pride, the rich child might seem an unlikely victim of insecurity. Yet stories of 1929 Wall Street suicides, like Browning's story of a dying bishop ordering his tomb, suggest that Coles is right about the role of possessions in maintaining rich people's identities (391), and his accounts of some rich children's view of poor people indicate their fear (doubtless an echo of their parents' views) that poor people would like to take away what the rich people have, and would do so if given the opportunity. Fear of less fortunate others underlies, I suspect,

much of the emphasis that Coles reports among the rich on avoiding crowds (377), on "withdraw[ing] . . . into a certain world of objects, habits, and rituals" (366) and seeking "privacy" (377), and on being "'self-sufficient'" (379)--the last an ironic and clearly defensive goal for those who rely on much poorer people to buy their groceries and cook their food; to clean their houses and care for and teach their children; to drive their cars, maintain their lawns, and provide "security" for them and their valuable things.

The dependence inherent in this situation, combined with disturbing contradictions in the society between myths that justify upper-class privileges (the myth of birth and breeding, the myth of meritocracy) and other widely held myths (the work ethic, equal opportunity), might well account for Coles's observation that "underneath" the privileged person's narcissistic entitlement, there are often "apprehension and gloom and . . . a strain of gnawing worthlessness" (366). Similar insecurities might be expected to exist, probably in more extreme forms, in privileged classes during periods of social upheaval such as the one Browning represents in The Ring and the Book, when long-established social hierarchies become unstable because effectual sources of power, such as money, are accumulated by people other than those who, like the high-ranking but impecunious Count Guido, find their sense of narcissistic entitlement less and less adequately supported by their supply of cash.

In the absence of talent or wealth, either of which seems to focus a child's narcissism in ways we have seen, the important others may still confer an extravagantly unrealistic self-conception that will

be difficult to maintain later on and from which great insecurity will therefore result. Freud's 1914 account of narcissism is I think quite useful for understanding how this might be the outcome of a kind of parental behavior that preserves an infantile psychic state beyond the period when it is regarded as normal. Because the immature qualities of the adult narcissist suggest an unusually direct continuation of early modes of being, it seems wise to pay careful attention to Freudian accounts of infantile and early childhood experience.

Of these accounts, Ferenczi's seems especially suggestive. Living in the psychic world of primary narcissism, he speculates, the infant or small child can preserve much of the "impression," lingering on from life in utero, "that he is in fact omnipotent" (218-19): the caregivers' empathic attentiveness (220-21) brings to the baby whatever it wants when it cries or makes "a given gesture," and as a result, Ferenczi suggests, the infant must feel like "a real magician" whose wishes and "signals" control "the outer world" (224). Later the child feels that in addition to possessing "magic gestures," it must have "magic thoughts"--for an "attentive entourage" can usually "guess" its unspoken wishes--and "magic words"--for "when the child actually formulates his wishes in words the entourage . . . hastens to fulfil them as soon as possible" (229-30). All of these "happy delusion[s] of omnipotence" continue to some degree until the demands of reality and "complete psychical detachment from the parents" overcome them (232).

Normally, according to Freud, this process of relinquishing delusions of omnipotence is accompanied by a shift from the infant's investment of psychic energy in the self to investments of it in others

and investment of it in a new psychic structure called the "ego ideal" (or "ideal ego"), toward which (s)he begins to strive when outer reality proves that (s)he is not the omnipotent and perfect being of his or her infantile self-evaluation (93-94). The ego ideal now becomes "the target of" the person's "self-love," setting a standard for "the actual ego" and thus "heighten[ing] the demands of the ego" (93, 95) in a way which, it seems to me, much resembles the way the Horneyan idealized self functions in relation to the real self.

These changes may not proceed normally if environmental influences, particularly the parents' influence, are not favorable. Here Freud's account of parents' investment of their narcissism in the child suggests how a narcissistic person might develop his or her inflated but insecure idealized image in response to parental "overvaluation" (91). According to Freud, parents attach the remnants "of their own [primary] narcissism" to the child, a move which allows them to attain a kind of "immortality" (91). Given the fantastic nature of its original source, this investment results in the child's being overvalued by the parents, who see only "perfection" and no "shortcomings" (Freud 91). Reconstituting in relation to the child their own "abandoned" feelings of being the omnipotent all, the parents tend to allow him or her to make unrealistic "claims to privileges," regarding the child (and through the child, themselves) as exempt from "necessities" such as "illness, death, renunciation of enjoyment, restrictions on his own will," and "the laws of nature and society" (Freud 91). The child is treated as though (s)he could "really be the centre and core of creation--'His Majesty the Baby'" (Freud 91).

It is easy to see that if such a parental attitude toward a child were prolonged past the early years of life, when "the infant's most genuine and legitimate needs" are "to rule over" the caregivers "'like a pasha'" "and to be coddled by them" (A. Miller 89), then the child, lacking the "healthy friction with the wishes and wills of others" that (s)he needs for "growth" toward maturity (NHG 18), would find it unusually difficult to abandon the world view and self-image of the small child. If the overvaluing parents were to allow the child to continue feeling like a magic (idealized) self as long as (s)he remained psychically attached to them, (s)he would surely continue to assume that his or her wishes are (should be) magic--an assumption breeding narcissistic claims--and would as surely continue to be psychically dependent upon others to fulfill them.

Though such a child might rule at home, the insecurity of this reign will become obvious as (s)he begins to spend more and more time in places like classrooms, where the sense of omnipotence will inevitably receive unsettling blows from even the most patient teachers and the kindest peers. The insecurity of such a child in the world outside home--where few will honor a claim for the unconditional acceptance to which (s)he is accustomed--is painfully evident to the child as well as to concerned adults who, like those of us who have taught elementary school, know that the current problems are still minor compared to those (s)he will experience if the important others continue to cooperate in preserving the child's dependent omnipotence into chronological adulthood. As Browning's Ogniben puts it,

> The sweetest child we all smile on for his
> pleasant want of the whole world to break up,

> or suck in his mouth, seeing no other good in it--would be rudely handled by that world's inhabitants, if he retained those angelic infantine desires when he had grown six feet high, black and bearded.
> (A Soul's Tragedy 2.477-81)

As is often the case, the Freudian way of seeing phenomena in genetic terms--here, narcissism as a condition that preserves or returns to an earlier stage when all of us were very much more alike than we are as adults--is very helpful in accounting for the spoiled-child mode of being common to all narcissists. It seems not to account so adequately for individual differences in each narcissist's well-displayed idealized self, differences that would ordinarily be at least as striking as the similarities. How can such variations arise from the parents' simply protecting the child's infantile narcissism? Two clues to an answer appear in Freud: the parents' "critical influence" shapes the ego ideal as it develops from childhood narcissism (96); and the parents' "wishful dreams . . . which they never carried out" are transformed into their dreams for the child (91). These factors, as Alice Miller enlarges upon them, seem adequate both to account for much of the variation apparent in narcissistic people's idealized selves and to point toward a better understanding of their major consequence--a dependency-related insecurity and an instability in relation to others that are deeper, more complex, and more pervasive than the insecurities we have previously considered.

Alice Miller's discussion of the narcissist's development emphasizes not the freedom from reality's limitations provided by the parents' narcissistic investment in the child, but the control exerted

over the child's being by the parents, whose investment is conditional upon his or her fulfillment of their needs. The narcissist's early childhood, Miller contends, is typically molded by "emotionally insecure" caregivers, especially by a mother whose "narcissistic equilibrium" hinges on the child's conformity to her expectations (8). The caregiver's motivation is therefore "indoctrination" of the child into a desired mode of behavior rather than consideration of and empathic response to his or her "needs at his particular stage of development" (75). Sensing the caregiver's purpose, the child shows "an amazing ability to perceive and respond . . . unconsciously" by "tak[ing] on the role that ha[s] unconsciously been assigned to him" or her and thereby "secur[ing] 'love'" (approval) and "a measure of existential security" (8).

The child's caregiver is thus gratified and, perhaps, feels that the child is, too; but in fact, Miller points out, the child's psychological health has been sacrificed to fulfill parental needs: being treated "as a possession" to be "control[led]" by the parents inevitably causes the child's "vital growth" to "be violently interrupted" (75). (S)he develops what Miller calls an "'as-if personality,'" or "false self" (12), in order to get conditional love and provisional security from the caregivers. (S)he "reveals only what is expected" and identifies with that; (s)he "cannot develop and differentiate his 'true self,' because he is unable to live it" (12). In Horneyan terms, the parenting figures set out an idealized image with which the child must identify, taking on as a self what is really an idealized self. The narcissist's idealized self thus functions as a

Great Should because it is developed in relationship to others' expectations--the shoulds of others, waiting like an elaborate stencil for the child to paint himself or herself into it. In terms made familiar by Browning's monologuists, the parenting figures give the child a role that (s)he must act out as though it were the self, performing their version of him or her to please them, the audience, and to win their applause.

Effectively playing the parent-assigned role has many implications for the budding narcissist-actor. (S)he develops defenses against "experiencing feelings," especially negative ones (A. Miller 10, 12) that might impel the child to slip out of character, as it were, and thus ruin the performance. (S)he may be encouraged to develop certain special talents that appeal to the audience, as we have seen. However, as Miller points out, the "inner riches" of a "gifted child" may also cause the parents to discourage such development, for such "a child's . . . great intensity of feeling, depth of experience, curiosity, intelligence, quickness . . . and . . . ability to be critical" frequently threaten the parents' equilibrium and their preconceived image of the way (s)he should be, so that they must "reject, suppress, or even destroy what is <u>best</u>, because truest, in that child" (97). Fra Lippo Lippi's childhood illustrates a third possibility, that the child will be encouraged and frustrated at the same time: the parenting Prior wished the boy Lippo to become the "'man of parts'" for their convent, "'to do our church up fine'" (138-39), but instructed him to "'Rub all out!'" (221) whenever Lippo's product did not fulfill the fathers' preconceived notions of what it

should be like. The adult Lippi continues to work in the resulting turmoil of conflicting impulses to "paint . . . as [he] please[s]" (226) and to "swallow [his] rage, / Clench [his] teeth, suck [his] lips in tight, and paint / To please them" (242-44). Under the circumstances, it is a psychological triumph that he can paint at all.

The child-actor, always mindful of the audience that also writes the script, is also prone to what Miller calls "bond permanence" with the parent figures, a condition that "prevents individuation" (13); as a result, (s)he will later be a "prisoner" of "the introjects" of the parents (internalized images of them and their attitudes) and will remain "dependent on affirmation from" others (18, 14). Like Lippi, (s)he will carry in the psyche "the old grave eyes / . . . peeping o'er [his or her] shoulder" (231-32) and even in Lippi-like extreme reactions, will never be free of the need to please the introjected authorities and those who, like the captain of the watch, stand in for them.

As another result of the narcissist's entrapment in childhood, growth out of the infant's normal narcissistic state (with its delusions of omnipotence and limitlessness) into an individuated, reality-oriented sense of self is thwarted by the child's having to focus upon parental needs and expectations "too early" (A. Miller 35, 89). The child's narcissistic "feelings and wishes" (A. Miller 33) and "fantasies of grandeur" (A. Miller 16), which (s)he needs to "live out" fully "without fear" of their upsetting the parent figures and with "the unquestioned certainty" of these feelings' being his or hers

(A. Miller 33), are instead "split off" and "partially repressed," so that they "retain their early, archaic form. . ." (A. Miller 35).

The outcome of these conditions is an adult who is, as the title of Alice Miller's book suggests, a prisoner of childhood. (S)he secretly harbors primitive narcissistic needs that can never be satisfied, "since the right time for that now lies irrevocably in the past" (A. Miller 43). (S)he preserves archaic narcissistic convictions about the self that can neither be completely confirmed in the real world outside nor completely banished from the person's inner expectations of that world and of the self. Childhood experience has not only alienated the narcissist from the real self, but also has conveyed innumerable messages that the real self is not acceptable to the parental images that (s)he always preserves within. The narcissist always nurses in some obscure depth, Miller says, "that probably greatest of narcissistic wounds--not to have been loved just as one truly was" as a child (85), but only loved as one falsely performed. (S)he has been deprived of the capacity to live from the real self because the parenting others' always-conditional approval of the performed idealized self imparted to him or her the other-dependent mode of being from which (s)he cannot escape. (S)he must therefore continue to rely on the confirmation of a series of replicas and stand-ins for those same others in order to maintain the substitute self with which (s)he has identified.

From these outcomes of early narcissistic development we may infer an adult psychodynamic governed by a peculiar set of tensions that interact to produce what I will call the narcissistic bind. One

major source of these tensions is unstable infantile narcissism. The adult narcissist, as we have seen, harbors amorphous, archaic narcissistic needs and conceptions that are poorly connected with, and therefore poorly controlled by, the adult version of the role-playing idealized self that was conferred--and imposed--in childhood. This conceptualization seems particularly compatible with Heinz Kohut's view of the narcissist as being "fixated" on "archaic [narcissistic] structures and . . . claims" (Analysis 3) that have not been adequately "tamed" and "integrated into the adult personality" (Analysis 27). The psychic energies tied up in these structures are unavailable for the "mature functions" of the personality, and the psyche lacks sufficient "internal structure" (Kohut, "Introspection" 1: 219) to prevent their "breakthrough and intrusion" into these functions (Kohut, Analysis 3).

Persisting archaic material thus lends a restless, unpredictable quality to the narcissist's personality, subjecting him or her to primitive impulses the very existence of which causes a sense of instability. Kohut remarks that narcissistic patients dread the regressions that such impulses cause: for example, experiencing "intrusions" "of unrealistic grandiosity" may cause the narcissist to "fear . . . loss of contact with reality" or "permanent isolation" (Analysis 152-53). Such intrusions frequently occur when the person is already vulnerable because (s)he "feels powerless, disappointed, lonely, and/or abandoned" (Bouson 211n13), so they doubtless greatly increase the person's intrapsychic insecurity.

Probably more significant, however, is the grave interpersonal insecurity that archaic narcissistic upsurges might be expected to promote in someone whose dependence on others' confirmation causes chronic anxiety about the impression (s)he makes upon others. Such episodes would lead to a feeling of continual dread that the performing idealized self cannot always be relied upon to make the right impression. It seems to me that the narcissist's habit of thrusting enormous claims upon others and his or her proneness to "blow up" in response to narcissistic wounds--traits that probably vary directly in intensity with the level of archaic narcissism in the personality--are especially likely to disrupt the individual's relationship with others-as-audience and thus to breed this kind of insecurity. Even if (s)he blames others for the problem, such externalization of instability only increases the insecurity about his or her all-important audience. For this reason, the common defense mechanism of externalization is I should think potentially more destabilizing for the narcissistic person than for any other neurotic type, contributing to ambivalence toward those others upon whose estimation his or her self-idealization depends.

The main roots of this ambivalence I think lie elsewhere, however, in the fluctuating attitudes toward the audience generated by the narcissist's movement through the process of performing (in anticipation of confirmation) and then reacting to the audience's confirmation. If others' confirmation of the narcissist's performance is to be really satisfying, (s)he must begin by viewing the audience as exceptional; otherwise their approval will not be worth much, and

seeking it will hurt the performer's pride. (S)he must not, however, begin by thinking of them as too exceptional, for to do that would make them potential equals or superiors and would arouse fear of failure.

The narcissist's situation is simpler, of course, if (s)he has been fortunate enough to find or create a thoroughly reliable audience whom (s)he feels safe in idealizing. From the point of view of reliability, an audience "owned" by the narcissist is especially desirable--people who are socially or financially dependent on the person, for example; or in settings where strong role differentiation exists (between men and women in traditional cultures, or between teachers and students) the narcissist may be able to find a reliable audience from the other role group whose favorable responses (easier to get from non-competitors) can be relied upon. By these or other means, whether in reality, in imagination, or in both, the narcissist must find the optimal level of audience idealization as (s)he enters each given performance--a step that must introduce tensions into his or her attitude toward the audience before each self-displaying episode.

Let us assume a best-case scenario. Having thus adjusted the idealization of the audience, the narcissist proceeds to perform, and they provide the abundant confirmation (s)he desires. (S)he soars high, buoyed by the total conviction that (s)he is indeed the idealized self--and probably in addition by an upsurge of an archaic sense of omnipotence and all-inclusiveness. From the heights of such absolute superiority, however, (s)he finds himself or herself looking down upon those others whose approval has just felt so important. Whether (s)he is conscious of it or not, they must seem to be inferiors

now. However benevolently (s)he may smile down upon and "love" these friendly admirers, a patronizing element is likely to creep into this benevolence as (s)he defends against an element of uncertainty. What is the applause of these people worth? And how is it that one like him or her is dependent upon their response? Why is it that as Alice Miller says, (s)he is "constantly occupied . . . with gaining [their] admiration," so that (s)he "is never really free" (39, 42)? And without freedom, is (s)he really omnipotent? Thus the narcissist's experience of even the most unqualified, most overwhelming confirmation tends to undermine its own effects, while anything less than that ebbs into a vague disappointment for which (s)he blames the audience to some degree. And the externalization, as we have seen, increases the person's ambivalence toward them.

Yet--still assuming a best-case scenario involving no major discontinuity such as the narcissist's becoming enraged or severely depressed--to the degree that (s)he is disappointed, (s)he will be drawn back to an audience. (S)he may be angry at himself or herself, as Slinn says of Browning's Don Juan, because of "being unable to prove his reality without external assistance" (147); but to feel better, (s)he will have to idealize some audience again, please them again, and be confirmed again. Or (s)he may resent the inferior others who make it such hard work to please them. Some resentment may come from a feeling that they are confining and thwarting his or her archaic grandiosity; some may come from a related source, the Sludge-like, Lippi-like "desires for revenge" left over from the person's having been "manipulate[d] . . . in . . . childhood" (A. Miller 112).

Resentment may also feed upon the narcissist's chronic inclination toward contempt for others: any "weakness, impotence, uncertainty," and similar qualities that (s)he sees in them remind the narcissist of similar childhood feelings (s)he had about the real self as a result of realizing that (s)he would "never be loved" unless (s)he exhibited those "achievements" and "gifts" desired by the parenting others (A. Miller 103-04).

Though these resentments may be very strong, the fact that they rise up in response to the current audience from whom (s)he now needs confirmation makes it quite likely that the narcissist will either suppress the resentment or seek another audience; will idealize them again; and will perform again. It is thus likely to be the narcissist's (largely unconscious) perception that surrounding others are a rather unstable lot whose sensitivity and intelligence come and go, a perception causing oscillations in the person's attitudes toward them and making him or her feel insecure about where (s)he stands with them--<u>even when (s)he is getting needed confirmation</u>.

The last and structuring source of the tensions associated with the narcissistic bind is the coupling of conformity with grandiosity that arises from the narcissist's self-alienated, dependent mode of being. It is easy enough to see how this coupling originally comes about. The parental figures cast the child in his or her role and hold out the prospect of winning their attention, love, and praise--<u>if</u> (s)he pleases them by performing the role to their satisfaction. When (s)he succeeds in doing so--that is, when (s)he conforms to their expectations--they lavishly provide the promised confirmation, which

makes the child feel that (s)he is the greatest, grandest, most wonderful person in the world. (S)he is the idealized self others have created--but only as long as (s)he continues to conform, since identifying with the idealized self is impossible without the approving reactions of others who mediate the child's grandiosity.

The tensions that arise from this situation and carry over into adulthood may be conceptualized as follows. Receiving confirmation by conforming with others' expectations makes the narcissist feel so exceptional that (s)he also feels (s)he should not be expected to conform to anyone's expectations. Hence the "poisonous humiliation" and "smoldering resentment" that Horney notes as narcissistic responses to others' "expect[ations]" (NHG 195) drive the person to reject others' conditions for giving approval; but the need to win their approval in order to feel exceptional drives him or her back toward conformity. The resulting vacillation might well be amplified by tensions associated with the person's unstable infantile narcissism or fluctuating perception of the audience. Outbreaks of archaic grandiosity and rage during the phase when the narcissist rejects conformity would arouse his or her anxiety about being unstable and would remind him or her of how dependent (s)he is upon others; (s)he would then need to placate the audience with exaggerated conformity or concern for their viewpoint in order to retain the supply of confirmation that (s)he must have; and so on. Receiving some confirmation but not quite enough, or not just the right kind, reinforces this vacillation. The narcissist must get more confirmation to overcome his or her disappointment and feeling of inadequacy.

(S)he would therefore have to suppress resentment of the audience and to idealize others once more. This necessity, combined with a sense of inadequacy, would cause him or her to reapproach the audience with something of the air of a humble petitioner for their approval.

If all these forces were acting upon the performer, the result would be pronounced swings from grandiosity, back to conformity, (if all goes well) back to grandiosity, and so on. This cyclical pattern, common among Browning's monologuists, might be taken for the alternating dominance of narcissistic and self-effacing trends in the course of inner conflict, but can ordinarily be distinguished from such an alternation by the consistent exhibitionism and continuous sense of others as an audience that mark both phases as narcissistic. To be caught in this cycle, continually being shunted from conformity to exaltation to conformity under the compulsion to experience incomparable greatness, and all within a structure of psychic tensions that allows little stability in one's attitude either toward oneself or toward others, is to live in the insecurity of the narcissistic bind.

IV

This description of adult narcissistic experience as the outcome of the narcissist's dependence on others for confirmation of the idealized self-in-performance emphasizes the role of contradictory attitudes toward the audience as both ideal and inferior and contradictory impulses to conform meekly with and to rise far above the reach of their expectations. The concept of the narcissistic bind thus involves a predominantly synchronic view of the narcissist's psychic functioning as the evolved product of total development, though it

takes into account the possible impact of remnants of infantile narcissism within this current structure of conflicts.

Yet given the many indications so far that the narcissistic person, far more than people of the other Horneyan types, preserves and maintains some very early ways of experiencing himself or herself and others, it would come as no surprise if a more comprehensive and detailed theory of narcissism, a theory emphasizing diachronic analysis of the phenomena we wish to explain, turned out to enrich our understanding of this complex condition and thus of Browning's monologuists and their speeches. For this purpose, I find that Heinz Kohut's theory, particularly as he presents it in The Analysis of the Self, is especially relevant. The opposing attitudes toward others operative in the narcissistic bind are suggestively similar to the contrasting attitudes toward the other inherent in Kohut's pair of archaic narcissistic psychic structures (the grandiose self and the idealized parent imago) and their associated transferences, while various possible "swings" or "oscillations" (Analysis 283, 221) that he notes in the narcissist's cyclical manifestations of depletion and grandiosity, in his or her vacillations between idealization of others and defensive grandiose withdrawal from them, and in his or her alternations between the two types of narcissistic transferences seem to parallel the movements between conformity and apotheosis characterizing the narcissistic bind. Kohut's explanations of the phenomena in terms of regression to earlier developmental stages in the narcissistic realm seem to me especially useful background for understanding the attraction to merged states of being, the

preoccupations with being gazed and smiled at, and the proneness to rage and vengefulness that we have noted in the Browning monologuist.

Kohut regards the narcissistic person as having retained certain psychic structures that are normally constructed and used in making the transition from primary narcissism to a mature "psychic organization," into which they are "integrated" (Analysis 3). The narcissist's transitional structures have not been adequately integrated and therefore pull the personality back toward earlier ways of functioning while mature modes of channeling narcissistic energies do not fully develop. The resulting "structural defect" makes it difficult for the person to handle a "narcissistic disturbance" of any kind, whether it falls in the category of unpleasant ones--"slights" by others, "setbacks" caused by "external circumstances," or "failures"--or in the category of pleasant ones--"successes" or positive recognition (Kohut, Analysis 62-65, 68). The narcissist tends to regress to an archaic position in response to such tension-producing events, overreacting with depression, rage, withdrawal, or (in the case of pleasant events) wild elation or grandiose exhibitionism like that of Cleon when he first contemplates Protus's gifts. The same regressive tendency explains why (s)he has trouble maintaining mature relationships.

Kohut's account of development in the narcissistic realm begins with a view of primary narcissism quite similar to that of Freud and Ferenczi. He theorizes that the infant's earliest experience centers upon a unified "imago of unconditional perfection," the continuation of which it "expect[s]" with "blind confidence" (Analysis 63-64). Under good conditions, the infant's expectations meet "optimal frustration"

because of the caregiver's "minor" imperfections; gradually withdrawing the original investment of narcissistic energy in this image of unified perfection, it uses this energy to build "psychological structure" that helps it to tolerate imperfect reality (Kohut, Analysis 64). Kohut calls this process "transmuting internalization" (Analysis 65). If on the other hand the caregiver is "grossly unempathic and unreliable," this earliest part of the maturation process remains incomplete, causing a fixation point to which the person may regress in the face of later tensions generated by "narcissistic injuries" (Kohut, Analysis 64-65).

In any case, the unitary perfection felt in "the preindividuated era," or "symbiotic phase," when the caregiver seems to the infant "part of" its own perfection (Rothstein 22, 18)--slowly "differentiate[s]" into two "new systems of perfection" (Kohut, "Forms" 246) that grow out of the child's efforts to maintain some of its old sense of unitary "perfection" (Kohut, Analysis 27) into the phase when (s)he is beginning to individuate. One of these systems, the "grandiose self" (Kohut, Analysis 25) or "grandiose-exhibitionistic self" (Kohut, Restoration 49), is associated with the child's fantasies of total "perfection and power" (Kohut, Analysis 106); with its "ambitions" (Kohut, Restoration 49); and with its exhibitionism--its focus "upon the self as the performer" (Kohut, "Forms" 252). If it could speak, it would say, "'I am perfect'" (Kohut, Analysis 27); it "wants to be looked at and admired" (Kohut, "Forms" 250).

The other structure, the "idealized parent imago," is "a narcissistically experienced omnipotent and perfect self-object"

(Kohut, Analysis 25, 105): an image of the caregiving other which the child endows with some of its own original sense of narcissistic perfection (Kohut, "Forms" 246) and "experience[s] as part of the self" (Kohut, Analysis xiv). The idealized parent imago is said to be "transitional" (Kohut, Analysis 25) because the other that it represents is not yet felt to be a "separate and independent" other (Kohut, Analysis 3), but is no longer felt as it is during the symbiotic phase, when the baby "expect[s]" to "control" the caregiver much as an adult "expects" "control . . . over his own body and mind" (Kohut, "Forms" 245-46). The idealized parent imago "is gazed at in awe, admired, looked up to," used as a model (Kohut, "Forms" 250), and "loved as a source of gratifications" (Kohut, "Forms" 247). The child seeks to feel that it "controls and possesses" this idealized parent through a "union" between them (Kohut, Analysis 90). If the child could articulate this relationship, it would say to the idealized parent, "'You are perfect, but I am part of you'" (Kohut, Analysis 27).

Kohut emphasizes that the formation of the grandiose self and the idealized parent imago, like primary narcissism, represents a normal, necessary step in psychological development ("Forms" 250) which, if adequately handled by the child's caregiver(s), will lead toward mature psychic structures. The child's grandiose self, with its exhibitionism, its fantasies, and its demands for attention and for fulfillment of all its wishes, needs to receive at first the caregiver's "exultant response to the total child" (Kohut, Analysis 118) and later needs "an echo to and a participation in" its exhibitionism (Kohut, Analysis 107); needs to have "the inner-glow

experience of the gleam in the parents' eyes" and their "perfection-rendering smile" as they respond (Rothstein 283, 196; cf. Kohut, "Forms" 252); and needs to be "seen and understood" (A. Miller 43). If these responses are "appropriately selective" (Kohut, Analysis 107) so that the child's grandiosity meets "gradual frustrations accompanied by loving support," the child receives constructive "confirmation" (Kohut, "Forms" 253) that builds its "realistic self-esteem" (Kohut, Analysis 107) while the energies of its grandiose self are channeled into "goal-directed activities" (Kohut, "Forms" 253) and "realistic ambitions" (Kohut, Analysis 141).

Similar maturation occurs if the child's caregivers deal adequately with the manifestations of the idealized parent imago. The child needs "to glorify" and identify with its idealized parents because doing so helps it to regulate and fulfill its narcissistic needs (Kohut, Analysis 139); thus, optimally, the parents will allow the idealization (Kohut, Analysis 139), but will take a realistic attitude that neither urges nor forbids the child to give up his or her idealization of them, that neither exaggerates nor zealously conceals their actual flaws. In the natural course of things, the child's idealized parent imago becomes more realistic as inevitable disillusionments cause the child gradually to withdraw some of its narcissistic investment from the unrealistic imago and, via transmuting internalization, to "preserv[e] . . . the externally lost quality" internally, in the form of an introject that contributes to the formation of the ego ideal (Kohut, "Forms" 248-49). Thus narcissistic perfection assigned to the self-object during the transition from

primary narcissism is taken back into the self, but in a new form that in Kohut's view helps to build a more mature psychic structure.

In the early development of a narcissist, the grandiose self and the idealized parent imago are not adequately handled by the child's caregiver(s); so these archaic structures and the needs they generate remain relatively intact and subject the person to continuing and increasingly age-inappropriate influences. A number of parental responses to the child's grandiose self can lead to this unsatisfactory outcome. The child's grandiosity and exhibitionism may meet a "traumatic lack of approval, echo, or reflection" from the beginning (Kohut, Analysis 191) or too soon (Kohut, "Forms" 250); they may first be indulged with "intense, . . . pathologically prolonged, unconditional, nonselective narcissistic gratifications" (Kohut, Analysis 249) that do not aid the child in channeling and integrating its grandiosity, but may then be traumatically cut off (Kohut, Analysis 144); or they may be responded to with mixtures or "rapid, unpredictable alternations" of "rejection and overindulgence" (Kohut, "Forms" 253). Any of these responses cause the child's grandiose self to be "repressed" or "split off" (Kohut, Analysis 144), so that its unrealistic grandiose fantasies never adapt to the limitations of external reality and thus make the person unusually vulnerable to narcissistic injury (Kohut, "Forms" 250). Energy trapped in archaic grandiose fantasies is not only unavailable for constructive use (Kohut, Analysis 144), but also builds up under repression or splitting off, sometimes to the point of "break[ing] through the brittle controls" of the more mature psychic structures and "suddenly

bring[ing] about . . . the unrestrained pursuit of grandiose aims" (Kohut, "Thoughts" 364-65).

The broadest consequence of the repression and/or splitting off of the grandiose self is not, however, such spectacular occasional outbursts, but chronic "disturbance" in the narcissistic person's moods. In one form of this problem, repression causes the grandiose self to be "wall[ed] . . . off" from "the realistic sector of the psyche" ("reality ego") by "a horizontal split" which denies the realistic sector access to the "narcissistic energy" tied up in the grandiose self, so that the person suffers "diminished self-confidence, vague depressions, absence of zest for work, lack of initiative," and the like (Kohut, Analysis 176-77). (S)he may tend to maintain this repression by showing "emotional coldness" toward others who might arouse the need for "narcissistic sustenance" (Kohut, Analysis 198).

In the other and more common form of mood disturbance (Kohut, Analysis 240), "a vertical split" divides off a section of the ego and the id from the rest of the psyche, where repression of the grandiose self still operates (Analysis 177). In the vertically split-off section, there is no repression barrier, so that the grandiose self is "present in consciousness" and "influences" the person; but it is not integrated with the reality ego (Kohut, Analysis 177). The vertical split causes a contradictory picture in which the person sometimes displays the unrepressed archaic grandiosity and sometimes displays the depleted reality ego (Kohut, Analysis 178). Kohut describes these alternations in various cases as "vacillat[ions] between an irrational overestimation of the self and feelings of inferiority" ("Forms" 252);

or as "swings between . . . states of anxious excitement and elation over a secret 'preciousness'" or superiority and "states of emotional depletion, blandness, and immobility" (Analysis 283); or as shifts between "noisily displayed" grandiosity and "vague depressions" (Analysis 180). These oscillations, in Kohut's view, occur because of an endless battle in which the archaic grandiose self tries to gain control of the psyche and, as it moves toward doing so, arouses the reality ego to defend itself against the takeover--an exhausting defense that leads to its "periodic enfeeblement" (Analysis 283).

Alice Miller describes similar swings between depression and grandiosity in "many" narcissists (43), though she accounts for them differently: "real pain over the loss of the self," incurred when the child became the false self that the caregiver(s) wanted, has been transformed to a chronic tendency toward depression, against which grandiosity is a defense (38). Like Kohut, Miller links depression to repressed or split-off grandiosity (38, 44). Though Horney does not comment upon cyclical patterns of grandiosity and depression in the narcissist, she notes "undercurrents of despondency and pessimism" in this type, attributing them to the person's tendency toward more or less unconsciously "measuring" the "life" (s)he has "by the yardstick of infinitude" and "fantastic happiness" (NHG 196)--a standard which, given its archaic absolutism, might well be the creation of the Kohutian grandiose self. Miller's and Horney's views are not metapsychologically consistent with Kohut's, of course; but all three observe a connection between grandiosity and a depressed or depleted

state--extremes closely paralleled by the grandiosity and needy conformity which help to define the cycles of the narcissistic bind.

Unsatisfactory parental response to the child's idealized parent imago leads to another set of problems typical of the narcissistic person. These problems stem from the child's "traumatic loss of" or disillusionment with "the idealized self-object" before his or her idealizing investment in it has been transformed into inner structures that can replace the self-object in its value-enforcing role (Kohut, Analysis 45). Sometimes the trauma is precipitated by circumstances such as a parent's death or separation from the child (Kohut, Analysis 79; cf. 170), a parent's "illness," especially if it leads to the self-object's losing interest in the child (Kohut, "Forms" 248), or a parent's inability to make things right in some genuinely "overwhelming" situation (Kohut, Analysis 170). Under such circumstances, lacking the opportunity for "the gradual withdrawal of" his or her investment of narcissistic perfection in the parent figure, the child internalizes the unrealistically idealized imago of it in order to preserve the narcissistic perfection it represents; (s)he therefore does not transmute the imago into the "internal structure" (s)he needs for self-regulation according to his or her own "values and standards," and (s)he "remains fixated on an archaic self-object" (Kohut, Analysis 82, 44-45). As in the case of the internalized archaic grandiose self, the idealized parent imago is repressed and split off as a "fantasy of an omnipotent idealized parental figure," a fantasy that cannot be reached and modified by reality (Kohut, Analysis 83; cf. 79).

The results of this pathological process vary according to the developmental phase at which the massive internalization takes place. When it occurs in infancy, the person is likely to have unusual trouble calming down when (s)he becomes tense, excited, or upset and so may look for someone else (or something else, such as a drug) to perform this soothing function (Kohut, Analysis 46-47). The person's repressed fantasies concern such things as "a perfectly responding, omnipotent, idealized mother-breast" or "vague and mystical religious preoccupations" that do not coalesce around a "unitary admired figure" (Kohut, Analysis 85). Traumatic blows to the idealized parent imago when the person is a very small (preoedipal) child interfere with the transmuting internalizations needed to give the "prestige" and "power" of the idealized self-object to the specific rules of behavior learned in the socialization process (Kohut, Analysis 48). Trauma immediately before, during, and just after the oedipal phase prevents adequate investment of narcissistic energy in the higher-level "values and standards" of the superego, and the person then always "search[es] for external ideal figures" to give "the approval and the leadership" that would normally come from the superego (Kohut, Analysis 48-49).

In general, a person "fixated on an idealized self-object" will always "unconsciously" "yearn" for and seek "external omnipotent powers from whose support and approval [(s)he] attempt[s] to derive strength" (Kohut, Analysis 84). The narcissist neither fully realizes the actual qualities of people from whom (s)he wants these things nor truly loves them; rather (s)he needs them to "substitute for the missing segments of the psychic structure" (Kohut, Analysis 45). The

narcissist unconsciously uses others as idealized self-objects so as to re-experience the sense of narcissistic perfection attached to the archaic idealized parent imago. As Susan Grayson puts it, "Perfect others allow the admirer to experience himself as worthwhile" (86).

One more possible consequence of a child's being failed by the idealized self-object is of special interest because, according to Kohut, it can lead to cyclical patterns of idealization of others and grandiose, isolating inflation of the self. Commenting upon the association of narcissism with juvenile delinquency, Kohut suggests that many delinquents' problems may be traced to their having fixated upon the idealized parent imago because of traumatic early experience with the idealized self-object. This trauma, Kohut believes, has caused "unconscious fear of" their strong need to find and "attach" themselves to a substitute for the idealized parent; so they must hide and defend themselves against the need (Analysis 162). They react, Kohut suggests, with "a defensive hypercathexis of the grandiose self," that is, an overinvestment of narcissism in it (Analysis 163).

This kind of hypercathexis can be characterized by "cold and imperious behavior" (Kohut, Analysis 80)--the "haughty grandiosity" of "narcissistic withdrawal" (Kernberg 215-16) from relationships into a "solipsistic" state (Fromm 77) like that of the cuckolded speaker of "A Forgiveness," a state in which the person is "isolated" and perhaps "near-delusionally superior" (Kohut, Analysis 93). Sometimes the hypercathexis is also signaled by "affected speech and gestures" and by "unrealistic grandiose feats" such as reckless driving (Kohut, Analysis 97, 99). A delinquent engaged in this type of defensive denial of

idealizing propensities most often will "loudly proclaim his contempt for all values and ideals," "flaunting . . . omnipotent unrestricted activities" as Browning's Duke does and often expressing Sludge-like "pride in his skill of ruthlessly manipulating his environment . . ." (Kohut, Analysis 163). This defensive exhibitionism is heightened by "embarrassment" at needing to idealize someone and "fear of . . . ridicule" because of his (or more unlikely, her) "sentimentality" (Kohut, Analysis 162). Thus cultural stereotypes--in this instance, expectations that men should be dominant and show no "soft" feelings--might contribute to the narcissist's defensiveness about the need for an idealized self-object.

Whatever the effect of social circumstances, however, Kohut contends that juvenile delinquents exemplify a proneness of many narcissists who are troubled by archaic idealizing impulses to overinvest the grandiose self to avoid the risk of idealization (Analysis 161-63). Yet as is the case when the grandiose self is repressed, unfulfilled "yearning for merger with the idealized self-object" causes the energies of the idealized parent imago to build up until their sudden breakthrough compels the person into "resistanceless merger with omnipotent selfobjects" (Kohut, "Thoughts" 364-65). These opposing tendencies generate a pattern of "vacillation between the search for external omnipotent powers with which the person wants to merge" and "a defensive reinforcement of" the grandiose self (Kohut, "Forms" 248n6). Again, Kohutian analysis of the narcissist's fluctuating relationship to the world arrives at paired extremes quite

similar to the boundary states defining the narcissistic bind: idealization of the audience and gross overinflation of the self.

Since the narcissist's archaic grandiose self and idealized parent imago are repositories of a sense of absolute perfection, (s)he seeks to return to them in the event of narcissistic disturbances. For example, a narcissistic wound often causes the person to regress to an archaic position (Kohut, Analysis 244). Regression is also likely when the person must adjust to a new developmental stage or to "external shifts" such as moving to a very different environment or facing an adjustment in "social role," for such changes may threaten a structure-deficient psyche, causing the "reactivat[ion]" of archaic structures (Kohut, "Thoughts" 367-68). Under pressure from them, (s)he "yearns" more than ever "for praise and approval or for a merger with an idealized supportive other because," given the immaturity of the internal structures, (s)he "cannot sufficiently supply himself with self-approval or with a sense of strength . . ." (Kohut, "Preface" 2: 846). To find another person from whom to get these supplies would always be desirable for the narcissist; but (s)he compulsively needs to do so when the archaic structures are unusually active. The relationship (s)he seeks is of course a regressive one in which the other would function as the self-object once did, during the early stage of development when the grandiose self and the idealized parent imago arose and dominated in the narcissistic realm.

Kohut has studied such relationships as they come about between narcissistic patients and the analyst, who allows them to develop "therapeutically activated forms of the two basic positions of the

narcissistic libido" (Analysis 213): mirror transferences, associated with activation of the grandiose self; idealizing transferences, associated with activation of the idealized parent imago; or both. The kind(s) of transference that the patient forms depend(s) upon the major fixation(s) in his or her narcissistic development. The transferences, in which the patient uses the analyst as a self-object, constitute the "direct continuation of an early reality" (Kohut, "Introspection" 1: 219); within their context, the analyst provides optimal frustration of the patient's archaic attitudes and demands so as to promote their transmutation into mature psychic structures (Kohut, "Forms" 244).

Narcissists outside the narrow bounds of psychoanalytic treatment seek to establish transference relationships, too; but such a relationship, unchanneled by analysis, is "a pathological interpersonal phenomenon" (Kohut, "Discussion of 'The Function'" 1: 163, 165)--an attempt to escape the tensions and vicissitudes of the narcissistic bind and to attain narcissistic gratification and equilibrium by taking a regressive position and reducing (or trying to reduce) another person to a self-object. In both types of transference, the narcissist claims total "control" over the other person almost as though the other were part of his or her "own body and mind" (Kohut, Analysis 26-27). For example, as Peer Hultberg notes, (s)he may "expect to be understood without imparting any information" (244). We may well recall the example of Browning's Duke, offended that the Duchess did not know his wishes without his having "to stoop" to tell her what they were ("My Last Duchess" 43). The other

therefore experiences the narcissist's supposed love as "total enslavement" or as "an anonymous existence in the narcissistic web of another person's psychological organization" (Kohut, Analysis 275-76).

Since the narcissist tends to "sexualiz[e]" narcissistic "defects and needs" (Kohut, Analysis 72), the search for a self-object often decisively influences his or her choice of a sexual partner--a fact especially ominous if the partner is female because, as Rothstein points out, the "typical" narcissistic man is quite ambivalent toward women, on the one hand thinking of them "as more powerful than men" and "feeling that he needs a woman's attention and participation to survive" (291) and on the other hand being "subtly mistrustful of women" and feeling conscious or unconscious "rage" toward them (294). Given that in our society (as well as those Browning represents) the mother is usually the child's primary caregiver and thus the earliest self-object, a male narcissist is probably much likelier than a female one to experience the sex partner as an instant replay of the mother. Relative to an infant or child, she is very powerful, in fact essential to the helpless small person's physical and psychic survival. At the same time, relative to a standard of total, instantaneous fulfillment of the small person's every demand, she is at best bound to be the target of some anger and, if she is narcissistically ungratifying or unreliable, she is associated with considerable insecurity and frustration. Mr. Sludge's suspicion and fear of mothers and their power and his indirect revenges upon the women around him, who are cast as mothering him, illustrate the narcissist's ambivalence toward the mother-woman.

The implications of this ambivalence unfold when we consider the man's opportunity, as an adult, to seek and bind to him--in a socially approved relationship such as marriage--another woman whom he will expect to fulfill his childhood "fantasy" of "an all-gratifying, narcissistically invested maternal object" (Rothstein 74). This combination of psychological need with social custom makes a narcissistic man a potentially more volatile partner for a woman than a narcissistic woman is likely to be for a man. In addition, just as the tradition of valuing male over female children increases the likelihood that a boy's mother will overvalue him and thus make him feel that he is entitled to such treatment, so adult role expectations that make a man's demands for attention and support from women more acceptable than are a woman's demands for these things from men further contribute to a narcissistic man's sense that he is entitled to "his" woman's cheerful service as his self-object. Social customs that accommodate the impulse of a narcissistic man like the Duke or Guido to enslave his partner may at times be reversed, of course, as Browning shows in "Cristina and Monaldeschi." In examining either kind of case, we must remember that the attempted engulfment of the partner in transference relationships is not primarily gender-determined behavior, but narcissistic behavior.

Much about the nature of such relationships may be learned from Kohut's descriptions of the narcissistic transferences (or self-object transferences) observed in analysis. He distinguishes three types of mirror transferences. All result from "reactivation" of the grandiose self (Kohut, Analysis 114), and all involve the narcissist's regression

to a version "of a child's demands for attention, approval, and . . . the confirmatory echoing of its presence" (Kohut, Analysis 124); but the types represent regression to different stages of early development in the narcissistic realm. In the "merger" transference, the "most archaic" of the three, the person extends the boundaries of the grandiose self to include the other, who "is experienced as a part of the self" and over whom (s)he thus "expects unquestioned dominance" (Kohut, Analysis 114-15). In the somewhat less regressive "alter-ego" or "twinship" transference, the self-object "is experienced as being like the grandiose self or . . . very similar to it" (Kohut, Analysis 115). The self-object is for the person "the separate carrier of his own (repressed) perfection" (Kohut, Analysis 123).

The "most mature," the mirror transference proper, is the "reinstatement of that normal phase of the development of the grandiose self in which the gleam in the mother's eye, which mirrors the child's exhibitionistic display," and other signs of "attention and understanding" from the mother (Kohut, Analysis 115-17) give the child "an echo and a confirmation of his greatness and an approving response to his exhibitionism" (Kohut, Analysis 123). The other, though perceived as distinct from the self (Kohut, Analysis 115-16), is still a self-object, for (s)he matters to the narcissist solely as the source of response (Kohut, Analysis 122). The narcissist's "urge to be looked at"--to re-experience the self-object's gaze (Kohut, Analysis 117)--usually signals regression or a tendency to regress to this type of transference. Rothstein notes that the person would rather "be noticed," approvingly or not (222), than "not be noticed" by the self-

object (248), since being noticed "recaptures an omnipotent sense of perfection" by showing the narcissist's power "to control" the self-object's "attention" and be in relation with him or her (222).

The counterpart of the mirror transferences, the idealizing transference, represents "the revival" of early experiences in which the child, having invested perfection in the idealized self-object so that "all bliss and power" are in it, "feels empty and powerless when he is separated from it and . . . attempts, therefore, to maintain a continuous union with it" (Kohut, Analysis 37). Like mirror transferences, idealizing transferences range from very archaic ones characterized by "merge[r]" with an "idealized mother imago" to more mature ones in which the narcissist, perceiving the idealized self-object as relatively separate, constantly strives for "union" with it by trying to maintain the other's "interest, . . . responses, and . . . approval" (Kohut, Analysis 55). The Browning monologuist's typical desire for the other's smile and gaze and preoccupation with having the other's face (especially the eyes) attentively fastened upon him or her can best be understood in these Kohutian terms, as manifesting a quest for some kind of transference relationship with an other.

A particularly interesting version of what seems to be essentially an idealizing transference is described by Rothstein as the "in-love state" (166) of the narcissist. In this state, (s)he "overvalues" and "incorporates" an "idealized object" and as a result, "feels elated" (Rothstein 166). (S)he compulsively "pursu[es]" this self-object and "panic[s] at the prospect of its loss" (Rothstein 167), for it is "the entire meaning of his life" (Rothstein 219) and

losing it would be like "death" (Rothstein 186). The person's "passive submissiveness" (Rothstein 166) toward the object causes an "illusionary transformation" when (s)he is united with it (Rothstein 187)--a union that often feels like a profound religious experience (Rothstein 219; cf. Kohut, Analysis 97)--but causes the person to be overcome by "helplessness" whenever the self-object is suffering or threatened (Rothstein 220). The narcissist is especially prone to regress to an in-love state when (s)he cannot bolster the sense of narcissistic perfection through his or her own activities (Rothstein 219); that is, the in-love state may serve compensatory functions when the exhibitionism of the grandiose self is frustrated (Kohut, Analysis 97). A character like Andrea del Sarto, whose grandiose ambition is chronically frustrated, can be profitably read in terms of his vulnerability to this kind of transference in relation to Lucrezia.

A narcissist's real-life relationship with another person may be based mainly on a mirror transference or an idealizing transference; however, these are not mutually exclusive categories, nor do they account for all or even most narcissistic relationships. Even in the limited, artificial analytic situation, deciding whether a narcissist's relationship with the analyst as self-object involves a mirror or an idealizing transference or both is not always easy, Kohut tells us. For instance, in "a satisfactory merger," he explains, "it is hard to know whether a humble self has made itself a part of an omnipotent archaic object" in an idealizing transference "or whether an omnipotent self feels it has absorbed the archaic object into itself" in a mirror transference (Letters 2: 866). When the transference relationship is

disturbed, the question may be resolved by noticing whether the narcissist wants "attachment to a powerful perfect object" or demands "that the selfobject be totally enslaved" (Kohut, Letters 2: 866).

A transference may also be "transitional or mixed": the narcissist may idealize the self-object and at the same time expect "mirroring [and] admiration" from it or treat it as "an alter-ego"; or (s)he may experience "rapid oscillations" between mirror and idealizing transferences, often because of the person's "defensive denial of vulnerability" (Analysis 221). It is easy to see how, in an idealizing position, the narcissist might feel that the weak, passive self had become too vulnerable to the self-object's overwhelming power and perfection; how (s)he might react by mobilizing the grandiose self; how its exhibitionism in relation to the self-object could arouse anxiety that mirroring might not be provided; and how a return to idealization might follow.

Regardless of the kind of transference dominant at a given time, the narcissist is always driven to control the self-object; to make the other into the source or mirror of his or her own perfection, according to the person's current needs; and thus, in Rothstein's words, "to preserve" (68) or "to restore" the "illusion of narcissistic perfection" (262)--in Horneyan terms, to preserve or restore identification with the idealized self. By emphasizing the singleness of the narcissist's goal whether (s)he is currently idealizing another or seeking confirmation from another, Rothstein helps us to see the essential consistency of this type's seemingly contradictory stances toward the self-object. Kernberg also highlights underlying

consistency in his analysis of the Kohutian idealizing transference as a variation of grandiosity in which the narcissist's "grandiose self" is "temporarily" projected onto the other, so that the potentially "threatening" status of the other as "an independent, autonomous person" is abolished by the narcissist's transforming the relationship to the other into a relationship "to himself expanded into a grandiose 'self-observing' figure . . ." (222-24). Kernberg thus explains the "oscillating situation" (235) in what Kohut would call a mixed transference as the effect of this "'switch on-switch off'" projective phenomenon, the "controlling elements" (232) of which are the key to understanding the narcissist's "sudden shifts" (223) in attitudes toward the other.

Though Kohut, Rothstein, and Kernberg differ as to the metapsychology of swings between idealization of and exhibitionism for the self-object, their observations suggest that beyond alternating expressions of split-off grandiosity and the reality ego and beyond cyclical impulses toward idealization and hypercathexis of the grandiose self, there is a general narcissistic tendency toward a continual yo-yoing between extreme positions relative to others--a tendency which, like the two more specific patterns just mentioned, contributes to the narcissist's psychodynamic entrapment. The transference relationships that (s)he seeks in hopes of escaping this predicament may thus tend to arouse further inner vicissitudes and involve the person more deeply in the toils of the narcissistic bind.

The intrapsychic instabilities attendant upon transference relationships--instabilities largely attributable to the archaic

absolutism of the narcissist's needs and to the potential for extreme oscillations in the prevailing psychodynamics--are amplified by interpersonal problems that are likely to thwart the narcissist as (s)he attempts to make others over into reliable self-objects and thrusts upon them his or her accompanying enormous claims for freedom from normal expectations and constraints, for endless attention and confirmation, for continual ontological support. Kohut envisions a perfect match in which two narcissists are satisfyingly joined "by predominantly archaic narcissistic bonds," one "enslaving" the other in a mirror transference while the other uses the first in an idealizing transference (Letters 2: 866).

I suspect it would be a rare thing to find this kind of mutual merger--the kind Joseph Conrad's Kurtz (always a voice talking) doubtless would have had with his Intended if the more archaic grandiosity in him had not found a transference relationship to a world of self-objects at the heart of darkness. Others usually resent and resist a Kurtz's encroachments, as Marlow does: "'You should have heard him say, "My ivory." Oh, yes, I heard him. "My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my---" everything belonged to him'" (Conrad ch. 3). Nor are others less uneasy than Marlow is with the compulsive idealizing that begets the "great and saving illusion" of an Intended, always "'ready to listen without mental reservation, without suspicion, without a thought for herself'" to a Kurtz (Conrad ch. 3), and always laying before some Marlow the uncomfortable choice of either protecting her from the truth at the expense of his own integrity or devastating her by stepping out of his position between her and

reality. The insatiable hunger of the narcissist--who, like Virginia Woolf's Mr. Ramsay, is always "demanding sympathy," demanding "to be assured of his genius, . . . then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed"--will not always find a Mrs. Ramsay to provide nourishment: "to surround and protect" him, leaving him "filled with her words, like a child who drops off satisfied," but "not being able to tell him the truth" about a myriad of things and, as a consequence of her ministrations, having "scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by. . ." (59-62).

Almost inevitably, the narcissist, who attempts to live as the sole and perfect self in a world of self-objects, will be thwarted by others and will as a result experience narcissistic injuries. (S)he may react in several ways to these injuries, these failures of the world to provide the transference relationships that (s)he needs and claims. Some of these reactions, as we have seen, are depression; lofty, grandiose self-isolation; loss of interest in activities which fail to evoke praise and confirmation; a change to a "better" audience; regression, including regressive fantasies, caused by a breakthrough of archaic narcissism; or a switch from seeking a mirror transference to seeking an idealizing one, or vice versa. Possibly the most spectacular reaction, and certainly the most spectacular one represented in Browning's monologues, is the complex phenomenon that Kohut calls narcissistic rage.

Various explanations may be offered for the narcissist's proneness to this volcanic rage and vengefulness. From a Third Force point of view, it seems to me, three characteristics of the

narcissistic person play especially important roles in the phenomenon. First, the unusually great magnitude of the claims and the breadth and depth of the conviction of entitlement that underlies them imply that any significant failure or refusal of another to honor some claim or agree with the narcissist's self-evaluation will feel like a global injury that threatens not simply the neurotic solution, but his or her entire being (cf. Fromm 75). Second, the person's unusually great dependence on others heightens the sense of peril associated with the injury, for being injured casts doubt on the reliability of others in general and thus on the safety of the world. Third, the narcissist's tendency toward active externalization of self-hate means that any pride-threatening failure to be the omnipotent, unlimited idealized self that always commands others' enthusiastic support is turned into hostility toward the source of the current injury. Altogether, if other possible reactions to narcissistic injury either are not feasible (one cannot always move on to another audience, for example) or are not adequate to absorb the narcissist's strong emotional response to injury, the offending other is liable to become, from the injured narcissist's standpoint, the embodiment of all injustice (having violated his or her sense of entitlement) and of all danger. The fear "emerges," Fromm suggests, in the form of an "intense fury" (75), a rage so great that only "the annihilation of the offender" can "'cure' the wound" (87) and restore the narcissist's "security" (75).

The probability that this revenge (fantasied or real, verbal or physical) will be spectacular may well be increased by a trait that Ivimey notes in relation to the narcissist's way of handling self-hate:

a tendency toward "dramatization" of intrapsychic pain via "exhibitionistic . . . outbursts" that keep the person "occupied in impressing others" and thus deflect the pain outward (15). Seen with this dramatizing tendency in mind, the expression of narcissistic rage in revenge appears to be not only a compensatory act--a magic remedy for the narcissistic wound already sustained--but also a return to performance through which the perpetrator seeks two things: reassurance that (s)he can get the offender's attention in the end and that (s)he is omnipotent and unlimited after all; and attention (if not approval) from another, perhaps wider audience which watches the revenge or gazes at the results. Revenge might thus become for the narcissist a means of capturing a new audience, again extending grandiosity into the surrounding world, and once more asserting entitlement to absolute rule over others. Such Browning revengers as the Duke, Cristina, and the speaker of "A Forgiveness" seem to be engaging in versions of this behavior, so that their monologues function in part to exhibit the corpse as proof of the validity of their claims and the reality of their omnipotence.

Kohut's examination of narcissistic rage emphasizes the central role of the archaic, "absolutarian" grandiose self and idealized parent imago ("Thoughts" 378) in cases of such extreme aggression as we see in these Browning monologues. In cases like these, Kohut argues, the injury feels to the narcissist like a traumatic attack on his or her "archaic perception of reality," with its "uncompromising insistence on the perfection of the idealized selfobject and on the limitlessness of the power and knowledge of [the] grandiose self" and with its archaic

demand for "unconditional availability of the . . . selfobject" for a transference relationship ("Thoughts" 385-86). Because the other does not seem to the narcissist a separate individual, but is perceived as a self-object, the revenger "show[s] total lack of empathy toward the offender," whom (s)he perceives "as a flaw in" the person's own narcissistic perfection (Kohut, "Thoughts" 386). That sense of the offending other as an irreversible imperfection in the self means that the person feels (s)he "can never wipe out" the effect of the injury, yet "cannot rest" until (s)he has done so; thus (s)he has an "unending compulsion" to get revenge "by whatever means" are available (Kohut, "Thoughts" 385, 380). To the degree that (s)he is functioning out of an archaic "mental organization," the choice of means is likely to be "asocial" because archaic thinking decreases the distinction "between self and not-self," resulting in decreased "differentiation between impulse, thought, and action" (Kohut, Analysis 155-56).

Though a decisive victory over the offender may be had if the narcissist's means are asocial enough (for example, killing the culprit), it seems to me likely that sustaining a serious wound would always leave a scar in memory and increased sensitivity to the potential for another wound--conditions like those Browning represents in his Duke, who has wiped out the offender, but who cannot forget that his last duchess really did not provide him the mirroring relationship he wanted and who cannot refrain from displaying his revenge as insurance against a future repetition of the Duchess's offense (cf. Rader, "Dramatic" 138).

Lack of a decisive victory (a discharge for the rage), combined with inadequate capability for defensive transformations of narcissistic rage into such phenomena as "social isolation, detachment, and fantasied superiority" (Kohut, "Thoughts" 387), leaves open the possibility that the narcissist's personality will move toward "the gradual establishment of chronic narcissistic rage" (Kohut, "Thoughts" 396). Lingering rage, Kohut explains, gains increasing influence over the more mature segments of the personality: more and more, thinking is put in the service "of the archaic aggressions seeking to re-establish control over a narcissistically experienced world"; the person's "reasoning capacity" is used to justify continued "insistence on the limitlessness of the power of the grandiose self" and to blame all "its failures and weaknesses [on] the malevolence and corruption of the uncooperative archaic object" ("Thoughts" 396-97). In the course of this process, narcissistic rage becomes more destructive: beginning "as grudge and spite," it may later be "acted out, in disconnected vengeful acts or in a cunningly plotted vendetta" (Kohut, "Thoughts" 396-97).

Vengefulness, I would suggest, might thus become the central expression of the narcissist's grandiose self, his or her way of preserving, protecting, experiencing, and defining the sense of omnipotence associated with that archaic structure. A person thus focused on vindictive triumph over a "crooked and hostile world" is, of course, a person who would be called arrogant-vindictive within a Horneyan framework (NHG 197, 206), and indeed, it seems to me likely that in Horney's arrogant-vindictive type we have a sort of specialized

narcissist whose archaic grandiosity, having developed in the direction of Kohut's chronic narcissistic rage, has been channeled into the formation of an arrogant-vindictive idealized self and whose archaic view of others as self-objects has been transformed by serious narcissistic injury into an arrogant-vindictive attitude that treats all others as unsatisfactory self-objects: his or her claims always "express a contemptuous disregard for others" (NHG 200); (s)he shows "very little, if any, sympathy for others" (NHG 211), instead "rather openly using them as a means to his ends" (NHG 205) as though they were extensions of the grandiose self; and (s)he responds with "punitive vindictiveness" if others protest the way (s)he treats them (NHG 200).

Given the metapsychological differences between any two theories and the difficulty of knowing whether "the patient population" one theorist has in mind is "comparab[le]" to that being considered by the other (Ornstein 241-42), it is of course impossible to be certain that a person Kohut would see in terms of chronic narcissistic rage would be one Horney would see as arrogant-vindictive. Nonetheless, enough parallels seem to exist between the accounts of the two conditions to justify a provisional view of arrogant-vindictive behavior and attitudes as a possible development of frustrated, injured narcissism. The narcissist's central rage for omnipotence, narcissistic rage at a world of unsatisfactory self-objects, and rage for revenge against that world thus could be seen, transformed and reintegrated around the central rage for vindictive triumph, in the character structure of the arrogant-vindictive person. Browning's intuitive understanding of some such possible, final transmutation of narcissism, I would suggest,

accounts for his representation of a terrifying continuity of psychic experience from a Blougram to a Lippi to a Duke, from a Caponsacchi to a Sludge to a Guido.

V

Looking back now at our profile of the prototypical Browning monologuist, we can see how the traits observed in the monologue speakers may be illuminated and integrated in the light of the theories of narcissism we have examined. These characters' sense of themselves as perpetual performers and of others as audiences, whose responses they must have in order to feel complete and valuable, can now be interpreted in terms of their having given up the real self and identified with an idealized self that was conferred upon them by others under conditions that allowed them to preserve childhood's grandiose convictions of perfection and omnipotence--but only when, by exhibitionistically conforming to and fulfilling expectations encoded in the idealized self, they could win the attention and approval of their audiences. As they continue this pattern of self-alienated performance in adulthood, their special preoccupation with capturing the gazes and smiles of the current audience and their underlying tendency to seek and experience some degree of merger with others manifest a continuing need for the mode of relationship within which other-dependent selves such as theirs are bred: the childhood relationship to the self-object, whose gazing, smiling participation in the infant's and small child's existence mediates its sense of perfection. Regression to minimally boundaried experiences of the self in this early relationship to the self-object is portrayed in the

monologuists' tendency to absorb or be absorbed by another person in mirroring and/or idealizing transferences and in their propensity for extending their grandiosity into their possessions and productions and for attempting to exercise interpretive control over the outside world in general.

The speakers' grandiose self-conceptions and fantasies of themselves may now be interpreted as aspects of their idealized selves, which preserve the convictions of magical omnipotence, limitlessness, and perfection associated with the archaic grandiose self alongside whatever specific attributes, real or imagined, they have internalized as a result of others' indoctrination, have learned to identify with, and have invested with neurotic pride in the course of their individual development. Their sense of entitlement, understood as neurotic claims, may be seen as expressing their idealized selves, revealing their needs for support and confirmation, and pressing upon the real world the unrealistic expectations that make them vulnerable to narcissistic wounds. Their sometimes acute, sometimes chronic rage and vengefulness in response to such wounds become intelligible in terms of their need to restore their pride and maintain their identification with their idealized selves; to transform self-hate defensively by actively externalizing it; and to wipe out anyone who blots the sense of perfection that these insecure, performing narcissists so much need to preserve.

As we shall see in the following chapters, theoretical concepts of narcissism also offer ways to proceed beyond genetic and structural explanations of the monologuists' traits to an understanding both of

the psychodynamic processes that govern their moment-by-moment interactions with their auditors--processes that turn out to be definitive of the Browning monologue as a genre--and of the developmental impact of narcissistic psychodynamics reported by the monologuists when they give accounts of their past. Finally, we can see now that the unhappiness, poor functioning, and destructiveness of many Browning monologuists and the grandiose self-conceptions that make almost all of them so painfully sensitive to others' opinions of them are the products of their alienation from the real self and concomitant dependence on self-delusion and others' confirmation to give them a feeling of worthiness and well-being. Far from exemplifying all human beings as they play roles and exist only in relation to others, they exemplify an inauthentic, other-contingent way of living, one unhealthy to the degree that the compulsive search for approval and for defenses against any failure to get it reigns over their relationship to others, motivates their work, and ultimately determines by its outcome their self-conceptions and the course of their lives.

CHAPTER 4
THE BROWNING MONOLOGUE AS NARCISSISTIC GENRE

Theories of narcissism, as we have seen, offer concepts highly congruent with the composite psychological profile I have suggested as prototypical for Browning's monologue speakers. The question remains whether the monologue form itself, as Browning practices it, might be accounted for in terms of these theories. That a genre so character-centered as the dramatic monologue might be primarily structured by the author's intuitive grasp of psychic structure and psychodynamics makes sense when we consider Rader's suggestion that all genres, though subject to conventionalization in the course of their development within a literary tradition ("Notes" 108), nonetheless are "extensions of our inborn capacity to imagine ourselves, other men, and the world of which we are a part" ("Dramatic" 151).

This "pre-conventional . . . base" underlying "literary forms" (Rader, "Notes" 108) is emphasized by Peter M. Sacks in his study of the English elegy. Responding to current critical approaches that he sees as having reduced the self to a function of language and thus as having failed to take into account "the presentational powers of language" (xi-xii), Sacks argues that "the genre's conventions" must be analyzed as "emerg[ing] from, and react[ing] upon," "the experience of loss and the search for consolation" (1); to understand the elegy,

Sacks demonstrates, the genre must be analyzed in terms of its "psychological underpinnings" (326). Sacks's work illustrates the viability of psychological analysis for dealing with a literary form in relation to the generic human experience--in this case, bereavement--from which it arises.

Paris suggests a different approach to such analysis, one perhaps more appropriate to a genre like the dramatic monologue which is not obviously connected, as the elegy is, with a single well-defined type of occasion. Pointing out that psychological theory "can help us to go beyond description to an understanding of the emotional significance of various generic patterns," he raises the possibility that such patterns may "embody the conflicts, the solutions, the world views, and the fantasies associated with particular defensive strategies" (Psychological Approach 288).

Paris's suggestion is I think clearly relevant to analysis of what I have called the psychic substructure and what E. D. Hirsch, Jr., would call the "intrinsic genre" of the Browning monologue--that is, to analysis of the "shared type of meaning" or "system of conventions" (92), the "unifying and controlling . . . purpose" (99) of which is "an entelechy, a goal-seeking force that animates a particular kind of utterance" (101). In the case of Browning's monologues, the narcissistic mode of experience is not only represented in the characters of many speakers, but is also the "entelechy . . . that animates" the genre itself.

This narcissistic entelechy expresses itself, first, in the all-commanding voice of the speaker--the "imperially possessive 'me'"

(Tucker, Browning's Beginnings 149)--asserting omnipotence as it creates and strives to control the universe of the poem. Tucker is responding to this aspect of the monologue's narcissistic entelechy when he says that the genre arises from the speaker's "assertion of will" to create and control meaning and accords to "its speaker an initial monopoly on truth, a commanding power over interpretation" (Browning's Beginnings 149). More specific to the genre as well as more distinctively narcissistic, however, is the monologue's conventionalization of the narcissist's habitual stance as a performer for an audience, from whom (s)he seeks responses to complete his or her being.

Some of the earliest work toward defining the genre grasps the importance of this generic feature. Curry, for example, insists that the monologuist's character must be seen "as moulded by the presence of some other personality," namely that of the "hearer" in the poem (12-13; cf. Sinfield 7); and Ina Beth Sessions likewise emphasizes as central to the genre the "interplay between the speaker and audience" through which "the hearer has a certain influence on the speaker" (508-09). Some recent studies of the monologue have developed further insights into this focus of the genre on the speaker as other-dependent. Mermin, for example, pointing out that the common view of the dramatic monologue as simply revealing speakers' characters does not "make much sense of auditors" (12-13), argues for a view of the monologue as structured to show the monologuist as "a social being" who both attempts to affect the auditor and is "significantly affected by the auditor's responses or refusal to respond" (1-2). Nina Auerbach

acutely diagnoses the dramatic monologue's generic embodiment of mutual influence as emphasizing the speaker's unusual sensitivity and ontological vulnerability to audience response: "The unbelieving auditor, not the pressure of truth, dictates the dramatic monologue," she argues; "the selves of these speakers . . . are in the process of continual and convoluted formation according to the auditors' unspoken demands" (166-67). The monologuists are in "fetters" because of "the constraints imposed by those unsympathetic others who dictate to the malleable self what it should be," and their "self-creation" is "enforced by the power of [others'] skepticism over the [speakers'] insecurity of being" (167).

The forces of confinement, generated by others' responses and pressing back upon the speaker's attempted assertion of omnipotence, thus constitute a second element in the Browning monologue's narcissistic entelechy. These elements--the voiced assertion of the speaker and the silent resistance of the auditor--are the generic equivalents of the psychological impulses that define the narcissistic bind. They might be thought of, too, as the generic embodiment of a narcissistic approach to life as a never-ending assault against the boundary between the self and the resistant other--in other words, as a perpetual effort to transform each encountered other into a self-object.

Thinking of the Browning monologuist's situation as always involving some version or phase of this effort allows us to see why certain Browning poems which lack auditors nevertheless strike many of us as belonging in the generic category called dramatic monologues.

Honan has noticed that even in a monologue with one or more auditors, the audience seems often to be in many ways merely "an objectified representation of some aspect of the speaker's own being" (156), or as Langbaum puts it, the monologuist seems really to be speaking "to some projection of" himself or herself in "a closed circuit" communication process (190-91). Both critics are responding, I suspect, to the way Browning's narcissistic speakers pull the audience into their own psychic space as they attempt to make the audience into their self-object--an extension of themselves.

By implication, if the narcissistic speaker who has an auditor present is addressing the other as a self-extension, a narcissistic speaker with no apparent auditor--a soliloquist--may engage in a variation of the same kind of discourse. Langbaum describes the situation in the soliloquies as one in which "the character almost 'others' itself and talks to itself as if to another person" (58; cf. Tucker, "From Monomania" 125). Revising this insight from the viewpoint of psychological theory, one could say instead that Browning's narcissists "self" an other when one is available and, when an other is not there, they still talk the same way, othering the self.

The speaker in "Porphyria's Lover" has fully selfed his other and is speaking much as he would if the living Porphyria were his perfect self-object; Johannes Agricola has selfed his Other just as thoroughly, for he, like the lover, speaks before his divine self-object as though in a stable narcissistic transference. Each of these soliloquists is simply a dramatic monologuist who has succeeded in completely appropriating the other as his self-object. The monk who speaks in

"Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" rages at Brother Lawrence, who not only is literally out of earshot in the presented setting, but also is psychologically out of earshot of the speaker's way of acting, thinking, and feeling. The monologuist's rage betokens his frustration at being unable to absorb the other monk into his own being: the speaker cannot self Brother Lawrence, whose resistance to becoming a self-object obviously evokes the tricks and plots through which the speaker hopes to make Lawrence his mirror image. Childe Roland and Caliban create such images where none are--and then are at the same time attracted to and fearful of them. As these examples suggest, the speaker-auditor relationship in the dramatic monologue may be conceptualized as the most basic, but not the only, way that the genre conventionalizes the essence of a narcissistic position in relation to the other and the world.

Having recognized the Browning monologue's built-in focus upon the narcissist's search for a self-object, we may refine the issue of its generic entelechy by considering whether Browning conventionalizes any other narcissistic concerns that further heighten or sharpen this focus. Does he, in other words, habitually conceive situations that in some way intersect with his speakers' narcissistic stance, setting off or intensifying their compulsion to self an other-as-audience? In raising this issue, I am simply restating the deceptively simply question that Curry asked in 1908: "When does a character begin to speak, that is, in answer to what,--as a result of what event, act, or word?" (79). Mermin confirms the centrality of this question for an understanding of the genre, contending that "the distinctive

characteristic of these poems" is neither "characterization for its own sake" nor "the ideas or truths or values" associated with the speakers, but the monologues' power to make us ask, "why does the speaker speak?" (47).

A number of answers have been proposed as generically definitive. Browning's speakers are engaged in a quest for "self-awareness," in a growth-oriented "personal search . . . for self" (King, Focusing Artifice xviii-xx); they are trying "to realize" their own "attitudes" (Shaw 118) or more generally, to define themselves (Peckham, "Browning and Romanticism" 62); or in "largely gratuitous" speeches for which "the dramatic situation" does not seem to be an "adequate motive," they are pursuing "an ultimately self-expressive or lyrical purpose" (Langbaum 182-83), exhibiting a "strange lack of connection with the auditor" because of their "rapt absorption in" the process of expressing their own "life's meaning" (Langbaum 189).

Other answers have attributed a more specific motivation for speaking to the typical monologuist. In reference to the monologues of The Ring and the Book, Altick and Loucks point out that all of those speakers are responding to immediate "intense motivation": they "are in danger of exposure, in hope of advancement, in shock, in outrage, in extremis;" all "are somehow trying to make a case" (10). Mary Rose Sullivan, defining The Ring's speakers as persuaders who "direct and shape their utterances toward influencing a specific audience," sees this case-making as more conscious rhetoric than "unconscious self-revelation" evoked by inner "crisis" (xii); Honan, similarly de-emphasizing the role of "immediate personal 'climax' or 'crisis'" (130)

in evoking monologues, points to the demands of an external "historical crisis" (131) and of a specific moment "when the speaker . . . feels he has something to gain by speaking" (141) as the common elements in the speakers' reasons for speaking.

In contrast to these views of the Browning monologuist's motive for speaking as stemming primarily from conflict with external circumstances to which (s)he responds opportunistically, other critics emphasize inner conflict as provoking the monologue speaker's utterance. Wenger, for example, argues that the monologuists' inner conflicts are simply exacerbated by their situation, particularly by what they perceive as the audience's silent skepticism (235, 228). In actuality, Wenger believes, the speakers externalize the troublesome suppressed side of their inner conflict onto the auditors and "use" their speeches "to regulate" the conflict; the auditors thus furnish "outward symbols" crucial in the speakers' "reconciliation" of their "dominant selves" with "the enemies within" (228).

Samuel L. Chell likewise observes that the speaker's reason for speaking "is frequently not . . . clear" because "the urgency of the situation . . . derives more from the deep emotional concerns of the speaker than from external circumstances" (63). Something in the nature of "an epiphany" is "challenging the speaker to make an important self-discovery," but the Browning monologuist typically "would . . . rather suppress than understand" the disturbing emotions and insights that threaten his or her "fabricated self-image" (Chell 62-64). The monologuist uses the "auditor's presence," Chell suggests, as "a public endorsement of" the "rationalizations" through which

(s)he defends the "existing self-concept"; the other, far from representing a "challenge" or provoking "self-revelation," thus offers the speaker "protection" against troubling psychic material (64). Wenger and Chell both see the auditor as somehow aiding the speaker's efforts to escape some inner distress that has placed his or her self-image in jeopardy, but do not find in the external situation a major source of the motivation for speaking.

The clearest insight into the motive provoking what J. A. Boulton has called the monologuist's "mingled process of confession, excuse, and justification" (168; cf. Burrows 201-02; Gridley, Browning 92) seems to me to unfold from Garratt's statement that "the dramatic monologue pits a character against a situation, which demands that the character fight for psychological survival. . . . the strategy of the speaker [is] aimed at duping or convincing his auditor of a certain image consistent with the speaker's world view" (125). In the monologue, the poet "let[s] the character . . . loose to scramble and to protect himself" against the psychologically threatening external situation (Garratt 125). Garratt thus recognizes that the monologuist's motive arises from the interaction between something in the context and some inner insecurity about his or her self-image--an insecurity which, having once been stirred up, will not allow the speaker to remain silent. Exactly what has happened to stir up this insecurity? And why does it make the typical speaker so intent upon turning the auditor into a self-object?

In a great many Browning monologues, what has aroused the speaker's insecurity is an event--one in the present or one just

resurrected from the past--that has injured his or her narcissistic sense of perfection, that has disturbed identification with the idealized self. This kind of event is so frequently observable in these poems as to be considered the psychological basis of a convention of the genre as Browning conceives it.

In some cases, the precipitating event is obvious. In "The Laboratory," the speaker is responding to at least two severe blows to her narcissism: after the previous night's episode during which her lover and the rival woman "whispered" together while the speaker looked on (33), the pair have openly gone off together, indifferent to the speaker's feelings and, she thinks, even amused at the thought of her pain. Caliban's chronic sense of injury has apparently been exacerbated by his being ordered to work through the hottest part of the day while Miranda and Prospero take a nap. Bishop Blougram's conviction of his own greatness has been shaken by the fact that Gigadibs, an inferior, has shown contempt for him (cf. Langbaum 184). Fra Lippo Lippi's sense of specialness as priest, artist, and "friend" of the Medici family (15) has been assaulted by the watch's laying hold of him as though he were an ordinary lawbreaker. Andrea's narcissism has been wounded by Lucrezia's demand that he paint according to the orders of her "friend's friend" (5) and further threatened by the argument they have had. Sludge's conviction of his all-controlling cleverness has been exploded by Horsefall's outraged reaction to his discovery of Sludge's cheating.

Other monologuists have suffered wounds in ways that we can understand only by interpreting a wider context in terms of the

characters' narcissistic vulnerabilities. It has been suggested, for example, that speakers like the Duke of "My Last Duchess" (Langbaum 182), the bishop who orders his tomb, and Cleon are facing no "crises" (Honan 130-31) that would arouse a defensive reaction. But the narcissist's unusual susceptibility to narcissistic insults, past and future as well as present, must be taken into account if we are to see that these speakers, too, are confronted by psychological crisis. The Duke's wound--his last duchess's thwarting of his need for her continual attention and exclusive mirroring approval--is only in the past if it is seen from the outside, as part of history. He still nurses that wound within himself, healed over on the surface that he presents to the world, perhaps, but as easily reopened as the curtain before the Duchess's portrait. There in the portrait, for as long as he keeps it, the source of the Duke's wound re-presents itself to threaten his sense of omnipotent perfection, for there the "glance" and "spot / Of joy" with which the Duchess responded to another man (8, 14-15) are preserved, always evoking the Duke's reaction to his injury.

Narcissistic wounds also confront the dying bishop and Cleon. The bishop is facing death, the ultimate threat to everyone's narcissistic conviction of indestructibility, and as we have seen, the tomb represents to him escape from that ultimate threat; in this context, his sons' apparent unwillingness to gather around and listen to him without being urged to do so poses a real danger to his plan for survival-in-stone. Cleon--though "certain of" his philosophy and confirmed by kingly gifts in his "self-confident" view of his accomplishments (Honan 130)--is responding to the kingly letter that

has asked not only whether Cleon has "effected all those things" the writer so admires (45), but also "how" Cleon "face[s] death" (165-66), the wounding reminder of which, ironically heightened by Protus's adulation, the monologuist has in his heart from the beginning of the poem. In these instances the situations to which the speakers respond are for them as psychically threatening as are those more immediately wounding situations that have struck a Sludge or a Blougram.

Once the typical provocation for the Browning monologuist has been formulated in psychological terms as a narcissistic injury, the speaker's need to transform the auditor into a self-object becomes psychologically intelligible, too. The strong reactions of a narcissistically vulnerable character to such injury cause him or her to grasp after another person whose mirroring of the grandiose self-concept that has been shaken would support the ontologically dependent self, whose confirmation of his or her self-idealization would restore identification with the omnipotent, perfect fantasy self and smooth away the inner turbulence that follows upon narcissistic injury. The speaker speaks in hopes of gaining that support and confirmation.

Many critics have recognized that Browning's speakers "rarely achieve genuine self-discovery" (King, Bow and the Lyre 126) simply because that is not their real purpose. They "wear masks," Peckham suggests, "not merely to conceal their true characters from the world but . . . to conceal their true characters from themselves" ("Personality" 91). Added to this self-protective purpose served by their "self-deception" and "rationalization" is a self-aggrandizing motive: gaining "manipulative control" over others by generating masks

(Peckham, "Personality" 90, 92). Less convinced than Peckham is that the monologuists' "insincerity, hypocrisy, duplicity, and self-deception" typify all "human interaction" ("Personality" 91), others have felt that "special barriers" and "private vulnerabilities" in Browning's characters usually prevent their "genuine introspection" (Hassett 69-70). "Self-preoccupied egoists" though most of them are, they are "engaged in existential defense of the being each has made for himself" or herself (Ridenour 16), protecting their "sense of individual identity" with "personal 'myths' of survival and justification" (Slinn 101)--constructing idealized selves, in Horneyan terms. Each hopes, Slinn argues, to persuade the auditor "to validate" his or her "status as a substantive subject" and "to affirm the essential stability and justice of <u>his</u> place" (152-53). Erickson, too, speaks of the monologuists' "struggles for recognition" as the central force behind the dramatic monologue (161); and Flowers recognizes that the Browning monologue is "'psychological'" not because the character engages in truth-seeking "self-analysis," but because (s)he "is shown . . . in the process . . . of constructing a persona which will be accepted by the auditor" (107).

It is evident that many readers have grasped the elements of self-fictionalization and the quest for its confirmation present in the typical monologue and have seen the need for ontological support that underlies the speaker's appeal to the listener(s). The theoretical framework that I have proposed allows us to see as parts of one psychic constellation the monologuist's situation--the narcissistic wound that has damaged the idealized self and threatens his or her being--and the

monologuist's response--an attempt to draw an auditor into the sphere of a renewed idealized version of the self with which, supported and completed by the auditor's attention and tacit consent, (s)he may once more identify. In reference to the ubiquity of psychological problems, it has been said that we are all the walking wounded. In Browning's monologuists, this condition finds a specifically narcissistic representation: they are all the talking wounded, seeking aid from the silent ministrations of the listening other.

Though this analysis of the Browning monologue as evoked by narcissistic crisis shows the genre to be associated with a particular psychological structure at its start, whether such an analysis may be extended to its total form remains an issue. The insights of a number of earlier critics do make clear that the genre evades many traditional logical and aesthetic canons. The dramatic monologue, as Chell notes, is "open" at "both ends," usually has "no orderly beginning and ending," and ordinarily follows no "rigid narrative chronology" (63). Its "unity" is "mimetic rather than aesthetic," embedded "in the realities of characterisation rather than in abstract rhetorical patterns" (Slinn 2); its structure, as critics have long recognized, is determined by "the workings of the [speaker's] mental machinery" (Symons 8)--not by "thought," but by "the processes by which thought moves" (Wilde 525; cf. Burrows 41; Saradhi 330; Armstrong, "A Note" 271; Slinn 4).

The principle ordering this "internal drama" (Altick and Loucks 10; cf. Flowers 102-03) of "the operations of consciousness" (Slinn 11) has been described in general terms as reflecting "the association of

ideas as they spring up in the mind" (Curry 89); as following impressionistically "the interior stream of sensations and ideas" (Irvine and Honan 118); as presenting "incidents" "arranged . . . in the order in which they became significant to the speaker" (Saradhi 327-28); as running by a "generative," "feedback" principle, "one utterance begetting another that in turn modifies the former" (Ryals 150); as giving "a presentation of experience . . . as the constitution in language of a subject-in-process" (Slinn 1); or as showing "individual character . . . as process" (Martin 100). Altogether, much in the tradition of Browning criticism points toward a consensus that the dramatic monologue is structured by its "mimesis of mental activity" (Posnock 4; cf. Slinn 1, 3-4). The psychodynamics of the speaker thus structure the monologue, "determin[ing]," as Langbaum says, "the arrangement and relative subordination of the parts" (83). Despite the genre's "highly limited and specialized" "powers of characterization" in the "temporal dimension" compared to those of a longer form such as the novel (Mermin 10), every aspect of the monologue's structure mimetically reveals the speaker's psychic structure.

My contention is that the structure thus generated is not simply a formalization of psychological processes in general. Rather, the Browning monologue is shaped by specifically narcissistic psychodynamic patterns. Structuring features such as the selection and ordering of content (for example, the choice of past episodes for telling and retelling), fluctuations in tone, and shifts in the speaker's focus (from self to audience and back, for instance) represent formal

embodiments of typically narcissistic responses to the psychic threat posed by narcissistic injuries and to the insecurities they arouse.

When we look at the selection and ordering of material in "The Laboratory," for instance, we may note the elegant way that Browning has constructed the poem around two scenes that are kept alive before us--the present scene of the speaker watching and talking to the chemist in his "devil's-smithy" (3) and for contrast, a seemingly enduring scene of a glamorous court, its handsome men and beautiful women always dancing, always changing partners, and always dancing again. We may note, too, how the poet's alternations between these scenes also builds our sense of them as two lines whose imminent convergence will turn the courtly dance of sex into a dance of death. But we will not understand the energy that erects and binds this structure until we recognize that it arises from a narcissistic compulsion, a compulsion that flows into the text through the speaker and pulls everything into its lines of psychic force: the compulsion to return over and over to the scene of a narcissistic injury, circling back to revisit and draw resolve from the shame and rage that the wounded psyche carries into every present (cf. Shaw 69, who argues that the speaker is obsessively "continuing" the painful past).

Another kind of selection process founded in narcissistic psychodynamics is exemplified in "Mr. Sludge, 'The Medium.'" Here the monologue is structured not by the repetition of one past episode of narcissistic injury, but by references to a number of past episodes that connect in various ways to the narcissistic wound Sludge sustains at the beginning of the monologue from the man who then becomes his

auditor. Much of the past material Sludge recounts is aimed at establishing channels through which he can transfer to others and to the past his shame at having just fallen short of his idealized trickster-self and his rage at having been so roughly called to account for his cheating. His early exclamation, "It's all your fault, you curious gentlefolk!" (85), sums up the content selection rule that binds together much of the monologue's structure. Sludge allows his shame to flow into and be neutralized by memories of triumphs that support his injured self-idealization, while his rage at his current wound merges with his rage at more unjust past injuries, a mixture that enhances his ability to vent his "righteous" rage by blaming a range of other people in addition to the auditor for his present pain. "Mr. Sludge" typifies many Browning monologues that are structured by the movement of psychic energy from present to past to present as the wounded narcissist draws upon the past as a source of excuses and a repository of his or her sense of entitlement.

Fluctuations in tone and shifts in the speaker's focus are also very frequently the surface manifestations of underlying narcissistic psychodynamics. In "Cristina and Monaldeschi," for instance, the controlled irony and indirection that prevail until the last two stanzas are periodically broken by menacingly violent exclamations: "--So, be warned, Sir!" (18); "Now,-- / Stand, Sir! Read!" (36-37); "Here you tire of standing? Kneel!" (66); "Mar" the tableau of queen and kneeling lover, "and one buffet . . . Pardon! / Needless warmth--wise words in waste!" (89-90). The effect of these sudden outbursts is to create a counterpoint to the queen's cool speech--a pattern of dire

portents that are waiting to take control of the poem's action like the energies of the waiting "abyss / Where the waters whirl and hiss" (70-71).

To comment upon the obvious role of the pattern in creating suspense in the plot does not so adequately account for the unifying power of the outbursts as does the recognition that they are the formal equivalent of an enraged archaic grandiosity which, always seething beneath the spoken text, occasionally breaks through its brittle controls only to be suppressed once more until, made stronger by suppression, it finally "burst[s] compression" as Cristina says her "Love" once did (141) and is released into the plot to act through the queen's self-extensions, three armed men and a priest. In similar ways a number of monologues formally manifest the narcissistic dynamic whereby breakthroughs from suppressed archaic grandiosity and idealization are followed by efforts to regain control over the regressive forces that are often stirred up by narcissistic injuries.

In a monologue like "Fra Lippo Lippi," fluctuations in tone accompany more profound shifts in focus between the speaker's impulse toward unbridled grandiose exhibitionism and his impulse toward appeasement of the listening other. Responding initially to the watchmen's rude arrest with an appeasing "I am poor brother Lippo" and a pacifying no-wonder-you're-suspicious reflection of their viewpoint, Lippi has soon shifted guilt toward his "cloister" by implying that the watch would find there many a "rat" like him with some "softling of a wee white mouse" (1-11). Thus relieved of his sense of exceptional imperfection and sure that his clerical status has been recognized, the

monk swings toward grandiosity, sarcastically congratulating his captors that now they "know [their] betters" and echoing their original question with a "Who am I?" to which he no longer answers "poor brother Lippo" (12-14). Instead he presents himself as "a friend" of "Cosimo of the Medici" who can patronize the captain of the watch with advice that his "knaves" should "Pick up a manner" that will not "discredit" their supervisor; who can grandly sweep aside this mistake of theirs with a "Lord, I'm not angry!" and a "quarter-florin" for the "lads" to buy themselves a few drinks; and who, having been recognized not simply as a monk but as "the painter," can benevolently draw the captain into the charmed circle of those who can appreciate the necessities of his exceptional temperament (15-31).

Yet when his delight in his own escapade overflows into a slighting comment about his current subject--"Jerome knocking at his poor old breast / With his great round stone to subdue the flesh" (73-74)--Lippi is drawn up short by his auditor's resistance: "You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see! / Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head-- / Mine's shaved--a monk, you say--the sting's in that!" (75-77).

He becomes now the humble orphan with a hard luck story in response to his version of the captain's unspoken question: "Come, what am I a beast for?" (80). His account of his deprived childhood, of his eight-year-old's attraction to "the good bellyful" and "warm serge" of monastic life, and of his narrow escape from expulsion because of his lack of aptitude for Latin (103-09) draws upon a rhetoric of audience appeasement through which he both appeals to the

captain's sympathy and allies himself with the captain as one of the "simple bodies" whose honest intuitions and common sense are condemned and denied by "the learned" authorities set over them, "They with their Latin" (168-75, 242).

Lippo's "pure rage" (254) at these absent opponents soon overcomes his anxiety about winning the approval of his current audience, releases his grandiosity, and propels him toward the open defiance of religion that shocked his auditor before. However, the monk again backs off from his enthusiastic praise of "The value and significance of flesh" (268). Once more he works to win his listener: "You understand me: I'm a beast, I know" (270), he admits. Once more he reins in his grandiosity and humbly turns his attention toward the future of painting and toward his likely successor, "Hulking Tom"; toward his own mortality; and toward his deference to the captain's viewpoint: "You be judge! / You speak no Latin more than I, belike; / However, you're my man . . ." (271-82).

Lippi's elevation of his listener to the position of judge does not last long, however, for within moments--his grandiose self-estimate stimulated by the act of setting himself out to be judged--he swings from his self-deprecating position to the soaringly superior position of the artist as Lippi defines that role. He does not simply catch the "truth" of "God's works," but improves them by making everyone else "see them" as though for the first time, so that "they are better, painted--better to us, / Which is the same thing" (295-304). Given the interpretation he could render in a trice with a mere "bit of chalk,"

Lippi assures the captain, "Your cullion's hanging face" would be really "noticed" for the first time (306-07); and

> How much more,
> If I drew higher things with the same truth!
> That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
> Interpret God to all of you! (308-11)

This assumption of his own prior-ity relative to all others, though manifested in an optimistic view of the world that is attractive to most readers, reveals the height of Lippi's narcissistic self-idealization: he understands God better than anyone else does and is better at revealing Him to human beings than He is at revealing Himself. The monk's contempt for and resentment of insensitive, lesser others--who expect such things of him as reminding the faithful of their religious duties and seeing his paintings as means to "pious" ends (316-31)--emerges all too easily when he is feeling thus identified with his omniscient, godlike grandiose self: "Hang the fools!" (335).

His own temerity frightens him, and he scrambles down to earth to win his auditor's approval:

> --That is--you'll not mistake an idle word
> Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
> Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
> The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!
> Oh, the church knows! don't misreport me, now!
> It's natural a poor monk out of bounds
> Should have his apt word to excuse himself:
> And hearken how I plot to make amends. (336-43)

It seems unlikely that the captain would at this point cause Lippi any real trouble, given the protection he enjoys from his Medici patron; as he recognized earlier, "If Master Cosimo announced himself, / Mum's the word naturally" (78-79). So his anxious reaction here to his own

presumption clearly epitomizes the plunge from extreme grandiosity to a profound sense of dependence on the other that characterizes the psychodynamics of the narcissistic bind. Lippi's fear of his own archaic rage, which has broken through his controls despite his need to win the auditor, only reinforces his mood swing.

Lippi's "plot to make amends" (343), as it happens, is a plan to paint out a fantasy in which he simultaneously satisfies the needs generated by his grandiosity and those generated by his appeasing, idealizing impulses, not ascending to and plunging precipitously from one extreme to the other, but rather drawing the extremes into one relatively unified and stable image. God, the Blessed Virgin and the infant Christ, angels, a few saints, and Job make up a "pure company" (368), or idealized audience, in the midst of whom, Lippi exclaims, "I'm the man!" (364)--both the humble monk in his "old serge gown" (367) and the powerful artist whose idealized self is superbly confirmed by Saint Lucy's introduction of him to a responsive "celestial presence" (372):

> "He made you and devised you, after all,
> Though he's none of you! Could Saint John there draw--
> His camel-hair make up a painting-brush?
> We come to brother Lippo for all that,
> <u>Iste perfecit opus</u>!" So, all smile. . . . (373-77)

Thus Lippi's audience doubly mirrors his grandiose-exhibitionistic self--he has made its members according to his lights, and now it collectively gazes and smiles upon him--and at the same time it offers a set of idealized figures with whom he can merge, "safe" "Under the cover of a hundred wings," hand in hand with "the little lily thing / That spoke the good word for [him] in the nick . . ." (379-86).

"And so all's saved for me" (388), Lippi remarks, and that is indeed the function of his envisioned painting: to save his sense of perfection while dampening the continual narcissistic oscillations that have structured his monologue. Insofar as the extreme positions that define the monk's psychology--his grandiosity and his idealization of others--are thus temporarily reconciled in his projected work, it may be said that his artistic gifts are capable of serving their "executive functions" in mediating and channeling the tension between the "two polar areas" of his "nuclear self," his "basic ambitions" and his "basic ideals" (Kohut, Restoration 49). The formal resolution of the monologue thus arises, like the alternating rhetorics of grandiosity and appeasement that pattern its development, from its foundation in the speaker's narcissistic psychodynamics.

The centrality of narcissism in the typical Browning monologue may thus be demonstrated both in relation to the psychological development and character structure of the speaker and in relation to the formal qualities of the poem. To give a preliminary example of this kind of double-pronged analysis, which will be tested at length in the next two chapters, I will consider "Pictor Ignotus," one of the poet's lesser known and shortest monologues. In the earliest published version of this poem, as in that of "Pauline" and several others, the speaker's inner experiences are more openly and immediately expressed than they are in the later version(s), where extreme grandiosity and idealization are regularly toned down and inner turmoil smoothed over and often relegated to the past. For this reason, I am using here the

earliest text of "Pictor Ignotus" (see appendix for the complete text, reconstructed from the 1845 variants in the Ohio Browning).

Unusually "vague" as to the "time, place, allusions, and audience," perhaps "to support the anonymity of the speaker" (Bright, "Browning's 'Pictor Ignotus'" 53-54), the poem opens just after someone who is watching the Unknown Painter as he works in a church has praised another painter referred to only as the "youth" (often taken to be Raphael, following the suggestion of Jamieson 8; cf. Jack 208n). The Unknown asserts that he could easily have rivaled the youth's work and concedes that he once aspired to the "love . . . and praise" (37) such work might have won for him; but "a voice" (41) of unclear origin and "cold faces" (46) among his audience, into whose crass and critical presence he would have had to introduce his paintings in order to become famous, caused him to choose instead to paint pictures of the Holy Family, over and over, in "endless cloisters" where they will "die," but safe from such "Vain tongues" (59-64, 69). He concludes his speech with a series of rhetorical questions addressed to the absent youth, asking whether the rewards he gets are really of any value, given their source.

Perhaps because the Unknown Painter seems to many readers such a "pale, thinly-drawn figure" in comparison with artist speakers like Andrea and Lippi (Griffin and Minchin 130-31), much commentary on the poem has focused on philological and thematic issues. Scholars have considered the possibility that Browning had in mind some historical person as the model for the speaker, who is apparently perceived as needing to have depth added to him from an external source. J. B.

Bullen's suggestion of Fra Bartolommeo di San Marco as the original for the Unknown ("Browning's 'Pictor Ignotus' and Vasari's 'Life'" and "Fra Bartolommeo's Quest for Obscurity") has found some acceptance (see for example Jack 209-12; Culler 209-10) despite a number of problems with the identification (see Bright, "Browning's Celebrated Pictor Ignotus" and "A Reply"; Bornstein 65). The poem has been connected with Browning's overall reaction to "religious art in Florence" (Ormond, "Browning and Painting" 187); with his interest in the rise of naturalism in Italian Renaissance art, an interpretation in which the Unknown figures as "a belated traditionalist" resisting or lagging behind the new trend (DeVane 156; cf. Culler 208; Slinn 43); and with his concern about elements in the Renaissance artist's situation (particularly the new phenomenon of "'movable pictures,'" which opened up a more competitive kind of art market [Culler 209; cf. Jack 212n]) that paralleled "perceived ideological dilemmas intrinsic to the Victorian marketplace": "the relation between art" (or poetry) "and 'the public'" (Martin 33) and "the corruption of art" in the "materialistic atmosphere" of a society in which it had become a commodity (Kaplan 113-14).

A number of readers have felt, however, that it is a mistake to see the Unknown as primarily the vehicle for any "trend or doctrine," contending that his monologue, like the story it tells, should be interpreted as primarily "an expression of personal temperament" (Jamieson 8) that reflects Browning's consistent subordination of interest in "large cultural changes" to interest in "the individual personality" (Bullen, "Browning's 'Pictor Ignotus' and Vasari's 'Life'"

314; cf. Bullen, "Fra Bartolommeo's Quest for Obscurity" 206; Bright, "A Reply" 209). Existing analyses of the speaker's temperament have nonetheless often reflected a thematic--indeed, a moralistic--approach to his character that tends to simplify and obscure rather than to unfold his inner life. The Unknown is charged with "timidity" (King, Focusing Artifice 77; Bullen, "Browning's 'Pictor Ignotus' and Vasari's 'Life'" 319; Jack 213; Bright, "Browning's Celebrated Pictor Ignotus" 193; Culler 208); with moral cowardice (Hassett 60) or (only a little better) the possession of a "weak and cowardly nature" (Bright, "Browning's 'Pictor Ignotus'" 54; cf. Ryals 205); with "a failure of character" (Kaplan 113), a "failure of nerve" (Bullen, "Fra Bartolommeo's Quest for Obscurity" 209), or the general "failure" of one "who has retreated from the challenge of life" (Jack 213); and with the "reprehensible," "self-indulgen[t]" "withdraw[al]" of a man governed by "his obtrusive and timid self-regard" (Hassett 29, 71). He is "the unprofitable servant" (Matthew 25: 30) condemned in the parable of the talents (see Bornstein 70 and Martin 36 on the implications of the allusion).

The Unknown Painter's motivations, his fears, and his rationalizations have also received less judgmental critical attention, but the resulting insights have not been couched in terms that allow us to understand the psychological coherence of his contradictory monologue: his "dreams about a blissful state of earthly fame" that for him would "replac[e] heaven" coexisting with his "nightmarish interpretation of attention" (Erickson 100-01); the verbal exhibitionism of his speech in contrast with the distant,

hyperregulated obscurity of his life; his claim to have chosen this life in tension with the pervasive sense of a life lived under some psychological compulsion. An understanding of the speaker's psychological development in terms of the vicissitudes of narcissism will allow us to see both the consistency of these seeming contradictions and the way that psychic forces associated with wounded narcissism account for the movements of his speech.

At the opening of the monologue we observe a speaker who, like so many Browning monologuists, has just sustained a wound to his narcissism, a wound the pain of which we can detect in his first response: "I could have painted pictures like that youth's / Ye praise so" (1-2). Evidently, while he was at work on one of his paintings, quietly minding his own business in a quiet church, someone--we never know who--has praised a younger painter while watching the Unknown's efforts. This is not simply praise of another artist, but praise which, in this situation, surely implies an unfavorable evaluation of the Pictor's current work in comparison to the youth's. Or at least it seems so to the speaker, who is not merely "piqued" (Jamieson 8); his "soul springs up" (2) in response to the provocation. The reasons for his extreme reaction lie in the type and height of the self-idealization that the Painter reveals; in the special vulnerability of this idealized self to the auditor's remarks; and in the threat that the state of being aroused poses to the speaker's psychic equilibrium.

From the Painter's outpouring of testimony to support his statement that he "could have painted" as the youth does (1-2), one can rather easily identify the kind of self-idealization that he is

defending as narcissistic. According to him, his powers are enormous, far beyond those given to the auditor and all other people. His "soul" could have "outburst on your [i.e., everyone else's] night with all [his] gift / Of fires from God . . ." (5-6). Added to his divinely inspired soul is "this flesh," which never "would . . . have shrunk / From seconding that soul . . ." (6-7). Thus the Painter's soul could reach any height, however infinite and eternal--"with eyes uplift / And wide to Heaven"; it could plumb any depth of any phenomenon, however minute and fleeting--"straight like thunder, sunk / To the centre of an instant"; it could be "around / Sent calmly and inquisitive to scan" every possible realm of knowledge--"The license and the limit, space and bound, / Allowed to Truth made visible in Man" (7-12). His soul is potentially all-inclusive; his intellect is not confined by anything except the "bound" which marks the "limit" of the "Truth" anyone can know, and his intuition can go beyond that.

The Painter's view of his particular talent is as unqualifiedly grandiose as is his view of his soul, body, and mind. Whether his talent is in fact great (as argued by Jack 209; Bright, "Browning's 'Pictor Ignotus'" 55-56; Kaplan 111; Culler 210) or whether it is not (as argued by Jamieson 8; Hassett 71) cannot be determined from what he says (cf. Bright, "Browning's 'Pictor Ignotus'" 57), and it does not matter. What is psychologically important is that he glorifies his talent in no uncertain terms:

> . . . like that youth ye praise so, all I saw,
> Over the canvass could my hand have flung,
> Each face obedient to its passion's law,
> Each passion clear proclaimed without a tongue. . . .
> (13-16)

Whatever "passion" he chose to personify--Hope, Rapture, Confidence (17-22)--he "could . . . have flung" its image easily "Over the canvass," for true to his narcissistic self-idealization, the Painter's "special brand of pride resides in 'effortless superiority'" (NHG 314). To have to work at his painting would betoken that he is ordinary; to be able to fling down perfection in a few slaps of the brush means that his artistic ability is truly extraordinary. Altogether, it is evident that the speaker identifies with his idealized self, believing that "he is the anointed, the man of destiny . . ." (NHG 194), harboring the narcissist's "blind conviction of unlimited powers, superior to those of all other human beings" (Ivimey 14).

The Unknown's narcissistic need for universal and unqualified confirmation of this grandiose self, the need central in his dreams of fame, allows us better to understand the vulnerability to his auditor's remarks that has precipitated the monologue. The key to the Painter's dreams lies in the fact that "he associates his personal fate with that of his pictures . . ." (Hassett 71) to the point of identifying himself with them: "Nor will I say I have not dreamed (how well!) / Of going--I, in each new picture,--forth, / And making new hearts beat and bosoms swell . . ." (25-27). He has extended his "narcissistic attachment" to his pictures, feeling them to be "an extension of [him]self" (Fromm 71-72) or, as Kohut would put it, experiencing them as self-objects. He is "in each new picture" (26, italics added), psychically speaking, so that his dreams of having his pictures go everywhere to meet great acclaim--"to Pope and Kaiser, South and North," to "great State, / Or glad aspiring little burgh" (28-30)--are

dreams of the confirmation he wants for himself. He wants the welcome he fantasizes for each picture: the people would throw "Flowers . . . upon the car which bore the freight / Through old streets named afresh" to commemorate the picture's arrival (31-32). Even more intensely identifying the picture with himself, the Painter further imagines the triumphal procession "reaching thus my home, where Age should greet / My face, and Youth the star as yet distinct / Above his hair, lie learning at my feet . . ." (33-35).

Through these responses, everyone would confirm the Painter's idealized self: wise, experienced folk would hail him, and the "Youth" would not receive praise, but worship him and recognize his superiority, as is his due. This pay-off for his wonderful qualities appeals to the Painter even more than does his own contemplation of them:

> Oh, thus to live, I and my pictures, linked
> With love about, and praise, till life should end,
> And then not go to Heaven but linger here,
> Here on my earth, its every man my friend. . . .
> (36-39)

Thus fed with "love . . . and praise" from everyone, forever, the Painter's narcissistic grandiosity would make the whole creation part of him--would make the world <u>his</u> "earth," transform it into his self-object. The Unknown's merging of his pictures and his audience with himself in this fantasy thus is not, as Martin argues, a matter of his interest in "maintaining the integrity" and wholeness "of the self" (38) by maintaining a "fusion of the producer with the product" that resists "the possibility of being alienated from his painting" (40). The fantasy is actually an unhealthy phenomenon indicating the

extraordinary degree to which the speaker's narcissistic need for self-objects has made him vulnerable to the kind of disturbing intrusion of reality represented by the auditor and his or her remarks.

We can now see that the auditor's praise of the youth has attacked the Unknown Painter's idealized self at exactly the point of its greatest vulnerability: its dependence on others' confirmation. In the auditor's opinion the youth has apparently exhibited enough of the powers that the speaker associates with his own idealized self to merit confirmation such as the speaker wants. The Painter's "envy" (Jamieson 8; cf. King, Focusing Artifice 77) is the manifestation of his resulting need to rise above the young painter. All expansive people are "extremely limited" in "their capacity to give credit to others . . . , at least within their field and age group," and thus "may be hypersensitive to having anybody's achievement praised in their presence" (NHG 311). This is certainly the case with the Painter, whose sensitivity to hearing the youth praised surely accounts in part for the fact that his defenses are mobilized: his idealized self "springs up" (2) in its impulse to master the threat posed by the younger man's accomplishments, and he expresses this impulse by entering his idealized version of his gifts into competition with the youth's gifts. In addition, the auditor's current failure to focus upon and confirm the Unknown and his work has aroused in the speaker a mixture of anger at the unempathic response he has gotten so far and eagerness to win the auditor's support for his grandiose view of himself. With respect to the auditor, then, the speaker is caught between the impulse to strike back in retaliation for the insensitivity

(s)he has just shown and the impulse to propitiate the auditor in hopes of getting confirmation to restore his injured pride and help him maintain his identification with his idealized self.

As a result of the auditor's remarks, the Painter's idealized self and his dreams of glory have become more and more vivid to him in the process of articulation, and his competitiveness, his anger, and his need for confirmation have all been stirred up. The Unknown's potential for this kind of extreme defensive mobilization is evidently a final reason that he reacts so strongly to his wound. Initially he places his narcissistic search for glory in the past, using "could have" and "would have," "dreamed," and other constructions that indicate he is trying to distance himself from the grandiose self and fantasies of omnipotence that he expresses. When he realizes that he still wants to fulfill his dreams, he is frightened: "that [dream] grows frightful, 'tis so wildly dear!" (40).

Though George Bornstein makes a fascinating case for interpreting the Painter's reaction as "fear" of the "intensity and freedom" of "his own powers of imagination" (70), this reading does not consider that the psychological focus of the speaker's imagination, namely himself, points toward his imagination's having its tap root in neurotic self-idealization and other essentially unhealthy processes. Seen from a radical point of view, the nature of the speaker's desire--its wildness, its intensity--suggests that it is a manifestation of archaic narcissism which, fueled by his rage at the narcissistic injury he has suffered and by the exhibitionism with which he has tried to defend himself, is now breaking through the Painter's psychic controls.

The Unknown's fear of such outbreaks, as we saw in examining Kohut's theory, is typical of narcissists, who often react to their disturbing tendency to have such uncontrollable feelings by walling off (or trying to wall off) their archaic impulses. A common defense for this purpose, according to Kohut, is cultivating "emotional coldness" and "keeping [one's] distance from objects from whom [one] might want narcissistic sustenance" (Analysis 198). Such a defense is reflected in the Unknown Painter's preference for an obscure career of painting Holy Families whose "cold, calm" gaze both mirrors and enforces this stance--a stance closely paralleling that of Horney's resigned type. Now, by invading the Unknown's space with praise of the youth, the auditor has both heated up the speaker's emotions and thrust himself or herself upon him as an object whose approval he cannot help wanting to win. Thus the wound that evokes the Painter's speech is not only a wound to his narcissism, but also a threat to his resignation.

In order better to understand the significance of the Painter's psychic condition once his initial move of exhibiting his idealized self has released too much of his narcissistic energy, we can analyze in Horneyan terms what has happened up to the point where his dreams become present to him again. He may be seen as a resigned narcissist: a formerly expansive type who "has abandoned the drive for actual mastery" (NHG 271) and who "has given up an active pursuit of glory," but "still must be his idealized self, which means that the pride system with its shoulds keeps operating . . ." (NHG 272). As we have seen, the auditor's praising the youth is a blow to the Painter's narcissistic idealized self, which he must maintain. By saying that he

"could have painted pictures like that youth's" (1), he attempts to restore his narcissistic pride in a resigned way; in accord with a possible course that Horney points out, "he . . . paint[s] pictures . . . in his imagination. . . . [while] doing away with both aspiration and effort" (NHG 262).

This course promises to preserve his idealized self without interfering with his detachment; at the same time, it allows him to exhibit his idealized qualities to his audience--to perform, according to his narcissistic impulses--but to stay detached by doing so only in the past subjunctive of the imagination ("could have"). So far, so good. The problem comes when the Painter's elaboration of his idealized qualities arouses his recollection of his former dreams. In the process of reconstructing them, the Painter's deactivated need for "love . . . and praise" becomes active again, frightening him with its sudden, intense upsurge, so "wildly dear."

If he is to preserve his resigned solution, the Painter must now defend himself against active wanting by convincing himself that he does not want to want and is going to be happy not wanting. In the process, he also reveals something of the inner conflicts aroused by his former narcissistic solution, thus allowing us insight into the reasons that compelled him to adopt resignation as his major solution and that drive him now to hold on to this solution and think it desirable.

He launches his defense by reminding himself that his dream of universal, eternal confirmation was "wildly dear" in the past, too, but that it aroused fears: "a voice changed it! Glimpses of such sights"

of triumphal confirmation as he dreams of "Have scared [him], like the revels thro' a door / Of some strange House of Idols at its rites . . ." (41-43). Bullen contends that "The 'voice' of line 41 is, perhaps, at once the most obscure and the most important reference in the poem" ("Browning's 'Pictor Ignotus' and Vasari's 'Life'" 316), and indeed the meaning of the "voice" is crucial in understanding the Painter's development. Bullen's and Ian Jack's (210) contention that the voice is Savonarola's rests, however, on the controversial identification of the Unknown Painter with Fra Bartolommeo di San Marco, an identification which, as A. Dwight Culler remarks in the course of accepting it, does not adequately account for the "psychological depth" the voice takes on in the poem (209).

Culler proposes that the Painter hears the voice "of his own puritanical conscience which would not allow him to satisfy the normal desires for fame in a normal way but, by repression, had enlarged them into . . . fantastic monsters," images of his "lusts" for "fame" which he sees, "as he peers into his own soul," in terms of an "obscene feast" or (in a later image) a rape scene (209). If one takes "puritanical conscience" to refer to a compulsive psychological force, Culler's reading of the voice seems closer to the mark than other proposed readings. Fred Kaplan's interpretation of it as "an inner voice which warned him" against corrupting his talent by putting it in the service of "the world" (111) assumes the speaker's fear to be the result of a threat to some principle, whereas the fear seems to be too stunningly instantaneous to have stemmed from a consideration of principles. Tucker's interpretation of it as "the originating power"

or "creative impulse" associated with the Painter's talent (Browning's Beginnings 67-68) underemphasizes the specific association of the voice with dreams of confirmation after creativity rather than with the creative act itself. Slinn's interpretation of it as mainly "a fear of public judgment" (44) connects the voice directly to later images of adverse criticism, whereas the voice apparently relates directly only to the Painter's vision of the fame he desires as being somehow a terrible sin for which he fears punishment.

The voice seems on the whole, then, to be some sort of inner dictate forbidding idolatry and associating it with fearful punishment; but aside from its having the quasi-religious status in the Painter's mind that Culler has detected, it remains ill defined except in the problematic context of a suggested source in Vasari. I also suspect that a source--or more precisely, a deeply embedded allusion--is a key to the voice's significance, but that the allusion seems obscure only because it resonates to obscure elements in the Painter's character structure--elements that are perhaps obscure to him, too, because he has repressed them. The voice, which is never identified as having necessarily spoken to the Unknown directly from the external world, may in a sense speak for or from something in him, as Clyde de L. Ryals has suggested (206); and though its message I think reflects ideas suggested to him by external sources, it probably should be regarded as primarily an internalized version of those sources that derives its meaning from their interaction with his psychology.

The notion of an authoritative voice that warns against idolatry is not at all unusual, requiring us to search out a particular (and

heretical) source for this one; this kind of warning is very common in the Judeo-Christian tradition, requiring only that we allow the Painter's warning voice to resonate to a variety of precedents for which we need search no further than the Bible. Examining the voice first in relation to the Painter's earlier dominant solution and inner conflicts will allow us then to see some typical Biblical precedents in their integral relationship to the psychological conflict that accounts for his eventual resignation and for his need to defend his resigned solution via the process of uttering his monologue.

Seen in the context of the Painter's former narcissistic solution, the voice undermined his dream of getting "love . . . and praise" (37) for his artistic achievements: it made him fear attaining the goal of his search for glory. The "voice changed" his attitude toward his dreams by arousing his fear "of such sights" (41) as that "of the picture in public triumph" (Bornstein 71) and more important, that of himself surrounded by all the people "on [his] earth," who are his "friend[s]" and adoring admirers forever (38-39). Now the dream of having his pictures carried in processions and showered with offerings of flowers seemed after all a dream of being an idol-maker whose narcissistic identification with his productions made them become his idols, while his skill caused them to become the gods of others.

Beyond this, the voice's analysis of the Painter's dream may well have extended the charge of idolatry from the specific content to the general structure of his neurotic solution: the narcissist's love of his idealized image makes it his idol, and his dreams of glory require

that he himself, not just his productions, become the idol of "every man" (39). Nor had the Painter envisioned any limits to this worship: in his dreams, he replaced God with himself and his painted images not only "till life should end," but for eternity: he fantasized "linger[ing] here" in glory, "on [his] earth," "And . . . not going to Heaven" (37-39). After all, the worship there might be for Someone Else, and narcissists do not care for competition.

Because the voice opposed dreams that were not chosen, but were rather the product of compulsive psychological needs, it is not terribly useful to analyze it primarily as the voice of conscience, giving him a moral warning that called for him to make "a moral choice" (Bullen, "Browning's 'Pictor Ignotus' and Vasari's 'Life'" 315), though he may have experienced it that way. The voice can be better understood in psychological terms, as the voice of his repressed self-effacing side. "Glimpses of such sights" as the scenes of triumph in the Painter's narcissistic fantasies would certainly "Have scared" (41-42) his self-effacing side if anything would, for as Horney observes, a key self-effacing trait is "the anxious shunning of pride, triumph, or superiority. . . ." A person who is predominantly self-effacing is even afraid "of winning in games" and will sabotage himself or herself if (s)he becomes aware of being in a "good position" to win; "in more serious matters than games," such a person's "fear of triumph . . . applies to success, acclaim, limelight" (NHG 216-17). Given the extreme form of triumph that the narcissistic Painter desired, it is not surprising that the conflicting dictates of his suppressed self-effacing side would have provoked a fear urgent enough to emerge into

his consciousness as though a voice had spoken to him--not surprising, that is, if the relevant self-effacing shoulds were strongly enough supported by internalized authoritative teachings.

The warning voice or inner dictate that triggers the Painter's self-effacing "fear of triumph" (NHG 217) is an intrapsychic parallel of a number of Biblical warnings to embrace a self-effacing attitude in relationship to God and to shun idolatry, which is regularly associated with expansive pride and presumption. When Solomon completed his great temple, he prayed to God, "let thine ears be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place" (2 Chronicles 6: 40). God soon replied to Solomon that He would grant the request (2 Chronicles 7: 12), but placed conditions on His help that clearly reflected His expectation of self-effacement and His intention to punish any presumptuous idolatry. His voice said,

> If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people;
> If my people . . . shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.
> . . . . . .
> But if ye turn away, . . . and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them;
> Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house . . . will I cast out of my sight. . . .
> And this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it; so that he shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and unto this house?
> And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, . . . and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.
> (2 Chronicles 7: 13-14, 19-22)

The rest of 2 Chronicles shows that God meant what He said. Almost half of the kings whose reigns are described engaged in the worship of other gods, and God showed that He would indeed punish idolaters. Jereboam and his army of eight hundred thousand took "golden calves" along for gods; five hundred thousand of them were killed by the much smaller army of Abijah, for the latter and his princes had "humbled themselves" before God (2 Chronicles 12-13). When King Jehoram "made high places in the mountains" for idol worship, the kingdom was attacked and looted, most of the royal family were "carried away" prisoners, and "the LORD smote" Jehoram so that "his bowels fell out" and "he died of sore diseases . . ." (2 Chronicles 21).

King Joash and his princes "served groves and idols"; having ignored the warning voices of various prophets, they encountered God's "wrath": a small Syrian army "destroyed all the princes," and Joash was murdered "on his bed" by "his own servants" (2 Chronicles 24). King Amaziah defeated "the children of Seir," but "brought [their] gods" home; having ignored a prophet's warning, he lost a war, had his treasures and a number of his household carried away, and was murdered by his own people (2 Chronicles 25). King Ahaz "made . . . molten images for Baalim," and he and his army were soundly defeated in four wars; apparently not one to learn from past history, Ahaz then "sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus," since Syria had won the latest war. Instead, those gods "were the ruin of him, and of all Israel" (2 Chronicles 28).

King Manasseh "built . . . high places" and "altars for Baalim" and even "set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house

of God. . . ." God "spake to Manasseh, and to his people" without effect; however, once God had sent the Assyrians to take Manasseh to Babylon in "fetters," the king "humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers," and God brought him back home. "Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God," got rid of his idols, and lived to die peacefully (2 Chronicles 33). King Amon "sacrificed unto . . . carved images" "And humbled not himself before the LORD"; soon "his servants conspired against him, and slew him in his own house" (2 Chronicles 33). Finally King Zedekiah "humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD" and allowed the priests and people to practice "all the abominations of the heathen" in the temple, and God had had it: "there was no remedy"; He "brought upon them" the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity (2 Chronicles 36).

Such examples as these and many others (e.g., Daniel 4; 1 Corinthians 8: 4-6; Revelation 21: 8) amply illustrate a regular Biblical association between a coherent group of psychological qualities--expansive pride, lack of self-effacing humility, and resistance to the notion that only God can be God--and a set of external signs: authoritative warning voices; idol worship, which implies the elevation of art objects (idols) to godlike status; and frightening punishments, often including betrayal by those close to the idolater. In view of this association, it makes psychological sense that the Painter's self-effacing side reacted against his narcissistic dreams of glory--so full of prideful self-inflation and presumption, so devoid of humility, so ready to conceive painted images and their human

creator as objects of worship--by expressing his fearful revulsion in terms made available and validated by his culture: he heard "a voice [that] changed" his dreams into a vision of idolatrous "rites" that "scared" him because of their possible terrifying consequences.

The same Biblical associations make sense of the Painter's describing his self-effacing vision in a way closely paralleling a specific passage in one of the prophet Ezekiel's famous visions. The prophet was taken up by God's hand "and brought . . . in the visions of God to Jerusalem," where God spoke to him and showed him "the great abominations" which were occurring in the temple (Ezekiel 8: 1-6). Ezekiel thus describes one stop on this guided tour:

> And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall.
> Then he said unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold, a door.
> And he said unto me, Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here.
> So I went in and saw; and behold, every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, pourtrayed upon the wall round about.
> And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, . . . with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up.
> Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth. (Ezekiel 8: 7-12)

Having shown Ezekiel a good deal more of the same sort of thing, God announced His intention to "deal in fury" with the idolaters (Ezekiel 8: 18), and then "He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man <u>with</u> his destroying weapon in his hand" (Ezekiel 9: 1). They came; and

God sent them out to "Slay utterly old <u>and</u> young, both maids, and little children, and women"--everyone except those "that sigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof" (Ezekiel 9: 6, 4).

In this episode can be found "a loud voice" like "A voice [that] changed" the Painter's attitude toward his dreams (41); a view "thro' a door / Of some strange House of Idols at its rites" (42-43); idolatry directed at paintings--unusual in the Bible, where idols are ordinarily statues, but just the thing to have struck the Painter; and a reason to fear "such sights" (41), for they are associated with God's imminent punishment of the participants. Given that Ezekiel's vision taken as a whole reflects the basic situation of the Painter's dreams--people praising pictures--but transforms it into a situation portending doom, it is little wonder that the Painter responded to the voice, his association of his dreams with idolatrous "rites," and his fear by saying, "This world seemed not the world it was before!" (44).

With his self-effacing side aroused by fear of the magnitude of his expansive pride and dreamed-of triumph, the Painter generated an association of these with idolatry and punishment, and that association in turn generated even more fear and even more self-effacing impulses. The effect was inner conflict that threatened his narcissistic solution and thus left both his dominant narcissistic idealized self and his newly activated self-effacing side vulnerable to any further threat that might occur. And the threat came:

> Mixed with my loving ones, there trooped--for what?
> Who summoned those cold faces which begun
> To press on me and judge me? As asquat
> And shrinking from the soldiery a nun,

They drew me forth, and spite of me . . enough!
(45-49)

In short, some people evidently criticized the Painter's work.

Being criticized, "press[ed] on" by "cold faces," exploded his dream of being surrounded only by the appreciative audience that he calls "my loving ones." Because the narcissist requires "extravagant and unconditional admiration and endorsement, full measure and running over" (Ivimey 17), in order to maintain the identification with the idealized self, the criticism was a blow to the Painter's pride as well as a violation of his claim for unmitigated admiration. His indignation at his critics' failure to give him the confirmation he needs and claims is in part the reason that he says the critics "trooped--for what? Who summoned those cold faces. . . ?" What are <u>they</u> here for? Who asked <u>them</u> here? Who are <u>they</u> to "judge me?"

Self-hate threatened to devastate him unless he could defend himself in this way against any sense of having actually failed. But to defend his expansive side was very difficult because his self-effacing trends were being reinforced by the experience of being criticized. Coldness and disapproval were agony not only for his narcissistic side, but also for this other side of him that needed warmth and acceptance on any terms; so self-effacement offered no escape from his self-hate. In addition, his self-effacing side had already been saying to him, "Your pride is dangerous; your dream is evil; you will be punished for your sins." This message is reflected in the continuation of motifs from the Ezekiel story. The critics "trooped" (46) like "the soldiery" (48)--like "them that have charge over the city . . . <u>with</u> [their] destroying weapons" (Ezekiel 9: 1).

They came "for what?" "To . . . judge" (45, 47) and destroy the idolaters. "Who summoned" them (46)? Said the self-effacing side, "You know Who." And that side took precedence in this emergency, "shrinking," hiding "asquat"; attempting to make the Painter a pure, weak creature, "a nun" protected from harm by her innocence--protected, in other words, under the terms of a self-effacing bargain with fate whereby a harmless person "who shuns pride . . . will be well treated" in return (Paris, "Bargains with Fate" 148). In "spite of" all that, however, it happened: the Painter was psychologically raped by his critics anyway. In such a situation as this--when a person's basic conflict between expansive and self-effacing trends has become violent, when both sides are extremely strong, yet neither has provided an adequate defense--one solution remains: "withdrawing from the inner battlefield and declaring himself uninterested" (NHG 259). That is what the Painter did: he cried, "enough!"; he became resigned.

We can now see how the Painter's past psychological conflict accounts for his having become resigned; but re-telling the story of the "voice" and its results now, in the present, seems to have upset rather than calmed him: he cries "enough!" in the present, too. How, then, does his speaking help him to defend, or recapture, his resigned solution? If we remember that the arousal of his narcissistic impulses has posed the initial threat to the Painter's detachment, we can see that by recalling how his narcissistic search for glory aroused terrible fear that ruined his dreams and by reminding himself how his active attempts to actualize his idealized self led to painful criticism, he is proving to himself that it would be stupid to allow

himself to try again and risk having the same things happen all over. We can see, too, that his re-experiencing the helplessness and fearfulness associated with his self-effacing side reinforces this conclusion. Finally, it becomes clear that reenactment of his basic conflict--the intrapsychic equivalent of his "reenacting" "his self-crippling choice" (Tucker, Browning's Beginnings 165) or "his abortive career" (Bornstein 65)--further reinforces his resignation from the conflict: when he cries "enough!" and breaks off his reenactment, it means that he has had enough inner conflict, enough risk and rape, enough striving and shrinking, enough of all that to last a lifetime. He has had enough of wanting.

It remains for the Painter to prove to himself that not wanting is really enough, that he really is better off not wanting than he could possibly be by wanting. He must do this in such a way as not only to reinforce his resignation from any active search for glory, but also to be able to see his resignation not as what it is--a defense to protect his idealized image of himself as an exceptionally gifted individual (cf. Hassett 29, 60, 73)--but as proof that he is an exceptionally gifted individual, "a man who has faced the alternatives and chosen wisely" (Slinn 43). Such a person would not withdraw from competing for recognition against those less gifted than he is unless his superior insight into the nature of the contest showed him that the contest's outcome is meaningless, in which case he is obviously better off than those less enlightened people who blindly compete for a prize that they wrongly believe to be wonderfully worthwhile.

Since he defines the prize narcissistically, as "love. . . and praise" (37), the Painter must impugn the currently available sources of the prize: other people. He must, in other words, adopt a defense often seen among a contest's nonparticipants and sore losers: the judges were not and are not any good. Contrary to Michael H. Bright's belief that the Unknown would not say anything to offend potential "patrons" ("Browning's 'Pictor Ignotus'" 53), whether his auditor will appreciate being included in his generalizations is the last thing the Painter thinks or cares about now that detachment is his major need. Attaining it is at this point a project more vital to him than persuading someone else of his greatness and rightness; he is out to defend himself from himself.

Thus the Unknown proceeds to paint a most unflattering verbal portrait of "those cold faces" that have "judge[d]" him (46-47). By simply speaking of them in a painterly way, he has already transformed his audience into "faces"--mere faces in the crowd, as the trite phrase goes; now he proceeds to give them bodies that hold up their faces and to dispose them on his canvas in compositions typifying their activities: "These buy and sell our pictures, take and give, / Count them for garniture and household-stuff . . ." (50-51). The faces are now embedded in genre paintings of bargainers and exchangers, interior decorators and furniture dealers; the figures are occupations. Transforming their actions into poses, controlling them by stereotyping them, distancing them by aestheticizing them, the Painter reinforces his detachment from and superiority to his audience. At the same time

he takes revenge against them by turning them into "garniture and household-stuff," mere objects.

How absurd it is, then, that

> where they [the audience] live our pictures
> needs must live,
> And see their faces, listen to their prate,
> Partakers of their daily pettiness,
> Discussed of,--"This I love or this I hate,
> This likes me more and this affects me less!" (52-56)

The question the Painter raises here is not whether the audience would care to live with his pictures, but whether the pictures he "could have painted" (1) could bear to live with them. The audience he portrays are dull, insensitive louts, barely alive, capable only of blunt discriminations based on primitive, uneducated emotions: "'love'" or "'hate,'" "'lik[ing] . . . more . . . [or] less.'" They are for him the clods who say, "I don't know anything about art, but I know what I like; and I like/don't like this."

In comparison with these viewers, the pictures he "could have painted" (1) would have been more alive, capable of feeling and expressing every emotion: "Each face obedient to its passion's law, / Each passion clear proclaimed without a tongue. . ." (15-16). These faces would have had not only bodies to hold them up, but varied, sensitive emotional lives to warm and illumine and move them,

> Whether Hope rose at once in all the blood,
> A-tiptoe for the blessing of embrace,
> Or Rapture drooped the eyes as when her brood
> Pull down the nesting dove's heart to its place,
> Or Confidence lit swift the forehead up,
> And locked the mouth fast, like a castle braved. . . .
> (17-22)

Pictures so alive as this, and alive in such a superior sort of way, really should not have been painted to live among such inferior beings

as the Painter's judges, any more than he should live by or for such judges' opinions. He was wrong ever to care about what <u>they</u> thought; but now, at least, he has revised his attitude. Now he is right.

Having found a way to take pride in being right to be resigned, even though that attitude "has determined his own defeat" (Ryals 207), defends the Painter's solution well because it helps him to preserve his idealized image of one with superior intellectual gifts and at the same time encourages him to maintain his resignation, since he will now feel wrong and get his pride hurt if he loses his detachment. His sense of intellectual discrimination "Wherefore [he] chose [his] portion" (57) is in fact so satisfying that the Painter proceeds to enhance it by showing himself how objectively he can weigh the advantages and disadvantages of his present situation and still come up with the same conclusion. It is true, he says, that sometimes

> My heart sinks as monotonous I paint
> These endless cloisters and eternal aisles
> With the same series, Virgin, Babe, and Saint,
> With the same cold, calm, beautiful regard. . . .
> (58-61)

But on the other hand, "At least no merchant traffics in [his] heart" (62). It is true that in "The sanctuary's gloom" (63) where he paints his pictures,

> Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine
> While, blackening in the daily candle smoke,
> They moulder on the damp wall's travertine,
> 'Mid echoes the light footstep never woke. (65-68)

But such a place "at least shall ward / Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart . . ." (63-64). If the alternative to this "monotonous," remote life is to subject himself, his "heart," to the

"merchant" judges (62) of the marketplace contest, the winning or losing of which is "Vain," then obviously this life is better.

As a correlate, if the only way for his pictures to have life is for them to be possessed by the "merchant" judges--for that is the other meaning of the Painter's statement that "where they live our pictures needs must live" (52)--then it is better that his pictures not live: "So die, my pictures; surely, gently die!" (69). At least they, like him, will escape "the crass and vulgar contamination of the world" (Bright, "Browning's 'Pictor Ignotus'" 60). By reaching this conclusion, the Painter can be, in his own eyes, the epitome of the impartial intellectual who looks unblinkingly at all the facts, unpleasant as they may be, and with relentless logic moves from them to inescapable conclusions--conclusions upon which a man like him will not turn his back, for it is his gift "to scan / The license and the limit, space and bound, / Allowed to Truth made visible in Man" (10-12). His former dreams of praise, it now seems to him, were attractive because he had not yet subjected them to the rigorous critique which has at last exposed their inadequacy for one who has faced the harsh realities of humankind's ineluctable ignorance and irremediably corrupt judgment. As for the young painter whose fame has caused him a brief moment of--well--regression, he is young, thoughtless, naive; and from the great distance imposed by the Painter's superior wisdom, he questions the youth gently, with a touch of nostalgia that soon will pass: "Oh youth men praise so, holds their praise its worth? / Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry? / Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth?" (70-72).

We leave the Painter in "The sanctuary's gloom" (63) once more resigned, "settling for a peace which is merely the absence of conflicts," a "'serenity'. . . . [which] means . . . simply the absence of all troubles, irritations, or upsets" (NHG 260, 263). His specious logic, based on the false dilemmas by which he has convinced himself that his "portion" (57) and not the youth's is necessarily the better one, has exposed to us his compulsive need to maintain a minimal life that seems to him well justified by the advantages he introduces with the phrase "at least" (62, 63). Indeed, "his resignation . . . is a process of shrinking, of restricting, of curtailing life and growth" (NHG 260). His is a life lived within the physical restrictions of "cloisters and . . . aisles" (59); within the artistic restrictions of subject matter represented by "the same series, Virgin, Babe, and Saint" (60); within the emotional restrictions represented by his style, which always expresses "the same cold, calm, beautiful regard" (61); within the restrictions on human relationships imposed by a "shrine" where most people, unlike the auditor, come just to pray, and the Unknown like his "pictures stand[s] apart" (64-65). As "at whiles / [His] heart sinks" (57-58), he is himself "the picture of resignation, . . . one of life at a constantly low ebb" (NHG 260). It seems a dreadful life; and yet, for a person with his psychological history it may well be the better portion, as he says--but better for reasons that he cannot afford to see.

By the end the Painter sees his withdrawal from actively searching for glory as a realistic decision based on a dispassionate evaluation of the nature of fame, and thus sees his life of "endless

cloisters and eternal aisles" (59) simply as the logical alternative; in truth, however, he has embraced "The sanctuary's" (63) emotional safety. Because gaining the goal of his narcissistic search for glory--"love . . . and praise" (37)--was a project totally dependent upon others' cooperation, his encounter with people critical of him was as traumatic as is indicated by his description of the experience as rape (on his fear of others, see Bright, "Browning's 'Pictor Ignotus'" 58; Hassett 72; Irvine and Honan 143; Kaplan 113; King, Focusing Artifice 77; Martin 40-42; Slinn 44). To be safe from any possibility of being hurt again, he has had to "retract all those wishes and needs which would require others for their fulfillment" (NHG 276) and has had to find a life that will stir up his need for "love . . . and praise" as little as possible. And the need is easily stirred, as his response to the unknown auditor's praise of another painter shows.

As a production painter of standardized holy pictures, he runs a minimal risk of having critics, either warm or cold; and that situation is safest for him, for being praised would be almost as much of a threat to his equilibrium as being dispraised has been. His pictures are not just "ward[ed from] / Vain tongues" (63-64); they and he are usually safe from any "tongues" at all: "Only prayer breaks the silence" (65), and he need not try to answer that. Thus he "avoid[s] situations in which [his shoulds] would start harassing him," as the resigned person typically does (NHG 279).

His defining his work as production painting also protects him from hurting himself by evaluating his actual paintings in relation to those he imagines he "could have painted" (1), or by competing against

himself to improve. He can instead regard the process of painting as the production artist or craftsman almost always regards production work: as a process of meeting a certain pre-set standard of quality and then moving on to the next piece. He can always meet the standard--"the same cold, calm, beautiful regard," in this case (61)--and, like the typical production worker, never feel that these pieces are to be taken seriously as his "real work." Because they "do not exercise him," Hassett rightly points out, they "cannot be used to measure his soul . . ." (74). They are just pot-boilers, and he can keep on selling them, as long as there are customers for "the same series" (60), without ever being disappointed by their reception, without ever "traffic[ing] in [his] heart" (62), and without ever having to incur "the risk and the effort of any change" (NHG 267). Regarding his pictures as pot-boilers also allows the Painter to look upon their "blackening" and "moulder[ing]" (66-67) with relative indifference: yes, of course, they will "surely, gently die" (69); but he has not tried to pour life into them, so he has never expected them to do anything else. He has not tried, so he cannot fail and be hurt--or be tempted to strive harder the next time.

Thus suspended in an environment that does not stimulate his dangerous need for triumph and occupied in a kind of work that does not test the extent of his actual talents, the Painter's narcissistic idealized self remains safe as long as he preserves his detachment. Even narcissistic people who are actively attempting to maintain their identification with their idealized selves often make "sporadic efforts" but show "aversion to consistent effort" because they are

afraid "of looking at themselves in concrete detail," as they would have to do if they worked long and hard on a single project and thus had to encounter "limits" on their abilities; but "as long as no efforts are made there is always the reservation that they would have accomplished something great if they had put in real efforts" (NHG 314). By resigning from his narcissistic search for glory, the Painter is able to make this "reservation" permanent. He "could have painted pictures like that youth's / [The auditor] praise[s] so" (1); for there were never any limits on his innate capacities, he says:

> No bar
> Stayed me--ah, thought which saddens while it soothes!
> Never did fate forbid me, star by star,
> To outburst on your night. . . . (2-5)

The "thought" of having unlimited capacities "saddens" him because he has not proved them; "it soothes" at the same time because his belief in them has never been disproved. He has preserved his idealized self--"saved" his "cup" of gifts (23-24)--by assuming a detached solution that allows it to remain a potential self. In "The sanctuary's gloom" where he works, the Painter's pictures may be "blackening in the daily candle smoke" (66); but in "the shrine" (65) of his imagination, freed "from involvement, influence, pressure, from the shackles of ambition and competition," he is "preserving [his] inner life unsoiled and untarnished" (NHG 280). Through resignation he saves his cup, uncontaminated by the "specks of earth" (72) that he imagines the youth's cup contains; the Painter has not "spilt" his dreams, though of course--unlike the youth--he has not "Taste[d]" them either (23, 72). A "bar" has "stayed" him, one he probably cannot see and could not acknowledge, if he saw: it is the bar between him and

his possible life, his real self; it is the bar behind which he preserves the impossible imagined life of his idealized self; it is the bar of his neurotic defense system.

The simultaneous portrayal in "Pictor Ignotus" of the speaker's development up to the time of the monologue and of his response to narcissistic injury in the course of the monologue makes the little poem a tour de force among Browning's monologues. Just as the Painter's extreme narcissistic grandiosity in the past aroused his fear of his own expansiveness, generating an inner conflict which, further exacerbated by lack of confirmation from his audience, drove him to resignation, so the extreme narcissistic grandiosity surging up as a result of the current narcissistic injury threatens him, resuscitating punitive self-effacing shoulds which, reinforced by the failure of confirmation he has just experienced, recreate the former conflict and drive him to resign once again.

The orchestration of diachronic and synchronic views of the Unknown's character structure and the nearly perfect coincidence of character structure and generic structure are achieved through Browning's brilliant choice of an auditor who replicates in the present the gaucherie of the speaker's past audience and through the poet's superb insight into the operations of memory in the phenomenon of repetition. These effects are not and perhaps could not be achieved in the long monologues. There, as we shall see in the analysis of Caponsacchi to follow, a plenitude of mimetic details tends to resist such elegant schemes by overflowing their limits and thus to necessitate separate analyses of the speaker's psychological

development and the psychodynamics of his monologue. That plenitude, however, provides the ample compensation of a phenomenological richness that could not be achieved in the narrow room to which the Unknown Painter is confined.

CHAPTER 5
CAPONSACCHI: THE NARCISSIST AS HERO

Now that we have developed a model for interpreting Browning's speakers and monologue forms in terms of psychoanalytic concepts of narcissism and have given it a preliminary trial in our examination of "Pictor Ignotus," we are ready to test the model on a more demanding monologue. I have chosen "Giuseppe Caponsacchi" (The Ring and the Book 6) for several reasons. Its lengthy revelation of the speaker, including a good deal of material about his past, will allow us to test the model's potential for both diachronic and synchronic analysis. That Caponsacchi is neither one of Browning's bad men nor one of his madmen--extreme character types whose language and behavior present rather obvious, easily interpreted symptoms--will allow us to test our model in the analysis of more subtle phenomena that demand sensitive, discriminating theoretical tools. The spontaneity of Caponsacchi's sprawling monologue, its intricate but uncalculated movement, makes it an exacting test of our model's capabilities for analyzing the psychic substructure of the monologue form.

Furthermore, the well-developed critical tradition surrounding the monologue will provide useful reference points for our test analysis. Aesthetic and especially thematic readings of Caponsacchi's character abound, offering a range of mythologized, theologized, and moralized

interpretations which, by revealing the effects of Caponsacchi's self-presentation upon readers who take this appealing character at his word, will allow us better to appreciate the force of his self-fictionalizing imagination. The common-sense psychological insights found in some of these readings as well as in the relatively small number of non-thematic interpretations will point to contradictions and cruxes that our model must be able to deal with and will allow us to compare the results of non-theoretical psychological readings, which have yielded excellent but usually scattered insights, with the outcome of our theory-based approach. This outcome, it seems to me, will demonstrate the effectiveness of theories of narcissistic character and experience for interpreting the psychological development and character structure as well as the moment-by-moment dynamics that shape Caponsacchi and his monologue.

Caponsacchi's role of hero and the rhetoric of spiritual transformation and idealized heroism that surrounds him have reigned over most interpretations of his character. In the aesthetic structure of The Ring and the Book, he opposes Guido in one more skirmish in the never-ending cosmic war between the forces of good and the forces of evil, in one more moralized, etherialized redaction of the romance plot whereby the innocent victim-heroine (captive of a devil/dragon/ugly man who threatens her not only with death, but with the worse fate of an obscure and sinister pollution) is snatched from his gross clutches, in the nick of time or eternity, by the chivalric hero--"angel" or "soldier-saint," as Pompilia says (7.1587, 1786)--who appears, as the

poet says, "in a glory of armour like Saint George," defeats the adversary, and "Bear[s] away the lady in his arms" (1.585, 587).

Reinforcing this aesthetic assignment of Caponsacchi's character to a slot in one or another mythic action is the rhetorical glorification of him by other speakers whose moral authority relative to that of other speakers privileges their characterization of Caponsacchi. For Pompilia, he is "a lustrous and pellucid soul," God's "servant," humanity's "friend," a man who is for "The weak a saviour and the vile a foe" (7.935, 938-39). He is strong, pure, holy, selfless, courageous--a "great soul" (7.1842). The Pope thinks that Caponsacchi was initially "less true . . . / To touch" and "less practised in the right" than Pompilia was and that he was "Faulty" and perhaps "rash" and "impulsive" (10.1086-87, 1101, 1144, 1147) in the course he chose to help Pompilia. These shortcomings, however, do not touch the essence of his "symmetric soul" (10.1135), which became "visible providence" (10.1086) and maintained a "new noble nature" (10.686) in his response to Pompilia's need.

The poet sees "The young frank handsome courtly Canon" (1.383) as only somewhat less ideal. Caponsacchi's attempted rescue "did . . . / For certain bring the tragedy about" (1.385-86); but even so his act was "A spectacle for angels" (1.503-04), a "God-glimpse" (1.596). His conflict between his earthly impulses and his spiritual allegiances has been resolved by the time he utters his monologue, and he is "the seeming-solitary man, / Speaking for God, [who] may have an audience . . . / Invisible" (1.1072-74). The cumulative effect of these highly

favorable accounts of Caponsacchi is to confirm, at the thematic level, his worthiness for the role he plays in the mythic action of the poem.

Most analyses of Caponsacchi's psychological development, as it may be inferred from his autobiographical account, and of his character structure, as it may be inferred from his monologue as a whole, have tended to harmonize the mimetic details of his self-presentation with the aesthetic function and thematic significance assigned him in the plot and in the rhetoric surrounding him in the poet's, the Pope's, and Pompilia's monologues, as well as his own. That is, the <u>associations</u> he takes on at the aesthetic and thematic levels are frequently translated into <u>explanations</u> of his psychology.

One such translation hinges upon the assumption that what Caponsacchi and the Pope see as the priest's conversion corresponds to a sort of psychological transubstantiation. Caponsacchi is seen as a man whose sexual hunger "was transformed" into "hunger for divine truth" (Shaw 280-81) when he was "reformed by love" (Jack 296); his "moral struggle" wins him "divine grace" and makes him "a chivalric hero" (Altick and Loucks 55). His "profound metamorphosis" (Buckler 136) under the influence of Christian "ideals" confers on him a "new identity" (Yetman 15, 19); he achieves "self-transcendence" amounting to "genuine self-realization" (Hassett 67-68; cf. King, <u>Focusing Artifice</u> 137, 147).

A second way of translating the rhetorical presentation of Caponsacchi into psychological explanation assumes less a sudden transformation than an uncovering, or revelation, of the priest's true nature. This approach shows the influence of the Pope's description of

Caponsacchi as a man wearing "The churchman's" "hypocrite's disguise" and "the worldling's" "fool's-costume," both of which outfits were "discordant garb / With that symmetric soul inside" Caponsacchi and both of which he threw off to defend Pompilia "undisguised" (10.1132-36, 1142). Such rhetoric is made explanatory in A. K. Cook's view of Caponsacchi's personality as comprised of a central core, or essence, to which are attached disposable qualities, more or less accidental, that his essence can overcome (114-15). William E. Buckler sees Caponsacchi's personality as composed of a more or less external, non-essential "dogmatic decorum" to which he conforms until he changes "the direction of his life" to conform with "the dictates of an inner voice," which represents an essential "higher morality" (7, 17). Sister Mary Richard Boo sees the priest as "drop[ping]" an "artificial personality" (186) to become "possessed of his true character" (180), and Slinn explains Caponsacchi's character in terms of a similar model in which his "identity as a social puppet" covers his "authentic identity" until he lays aside the former (115-22).

The transformation approach and the revelation approach explain Caponsacchi's psychological development in ways consistent with the privileged rhetoric of development used by and about him, and both place a positive value on the direction of his development. However, these approaches lack specificity and rigor as psychological explanations. They do not, for example, explain what particular psychodynamic processes would be equivalent to undergoing "conversion," or consider what conception of character structure would allow someone to strip off patterns of behavior and the effects of

environment (in somewhat the way one might take off one's clothes) in order to reveal the true or authentic identity underneath. These approaches also naively assume that Caponsacchi's increased moral earnestness necessarily implies his achievement of authenticity. Finally, proponents of these approaches tend to minimize or rationalize away the discrepancies between their favorable interpretations of Caponsacchi's development and the actual matter and manner of his monologue--a tendency that supports Judith Wilt's characterization of the adulatory trend in analyses of the priest as "a great deal of loose talk" (352).

The most important of these discrepancies is the prevailing one between what Caponsacchi did and what he says about it. Citing John Morley's view that Caponsacchi's "action . . . is not much more than the lofty defiance of a conventionality, the contemplated penalty being only small," Cook tries to save the priest's heroism by shifting it into the realm of potentiality (114-15); however, Morley's point remains: the priest's attitude of "lofty defiance" indicates a self-estimate that the actual events do not support. Though Caponsacchi may consciously intend to be "absolutely honest," as Altick and Loucks believe he is (128), others have seen that even by the end, he still needs a "more truthful language" and far less dependence on "self-delusion" (Buckler 17-18; cf. Armstrong, "Note" 274-75). Such persisting discrepancies between events and descriptions of them suggest that Caponsacchi's imagination may be serving his psychological defense system by re-making reality to coincide more closely with an idealized version of himself.

Other characteristics of the monologue call into question the common interpretation of Caponsacchi's development as a transformation to or revelation of what Horney would call his real self. The "conversion" itself, which Charles E. Nelson has aptly compared to his assuming a heroic "role" that he "seems to grow into" (92), is too sudden to be a sign of healthy growth, which does not produce results within a few days' time. An "instinct" that "dramatizes . . . and externalizes" itself in an idealized role (Nelson 92)--urged on by "the dictates of an inner voice" (Buckler 7)--sounds more symptomatic of a search for glory, in which inner dictates drive one to make oneself over into an idealized self which, like a superhero's role, can be actualized only through illusion. Inner conflicts of the kind incurred in the course of such strivings rend Caponsacchi in any number of episodes; these are not characteristic of a person with the "sound sense of wholeness, oneness" that distinguishes someone in touch with his or her real self (NHG 157), but of a person who, as Boethius puts it, has forgotten what he is (19)--if he ever knew.

I am uneasy, then, with interpretations of Caponsacchi that project his aesthetic and thematic status as a saintly hero onto his realistically drawn character structure, making him a paragon of self-realization. Of course he plays the hero's role in the plot; of course he is a more desirable person, from a social or moral point of view, than Guido or the other characters who find it expedient to underestimate Guido's vindictiveness and to overlook Pompilia's suffering; of course his impulse to try to help Pompilia reflects, in Nelson's words, "an instinct toward right action" (94). I question

whether the total picture of his character and inner dynamics, of his emotional responses and his actions, has the significance at the psychological level that has been attributed to them. Will detailed analysis of Browning's mimetic portrait yield an explanation of Caponsacchi's responses and actions that is harmonious with the aesthetic and thematic weight that is placed on them?

Psychological analysis of Caponsacchi does not reveal such a harmony. Rather it reveals a man with a long history of self-alienation and inner conflicts. His childhood and youth, set in a context of great family privilege in the present but presided over, too, by a still greater, towering figure from the family past, hold up before him two ways to attain glory himself. The first way to glory is one he can expect to follow rather easily, for his family's position entitles him to walk a long but a relatively smooth and pleasant path--a path of conformity, indulgence, and approval--to a bishop's throne. The second way to glory--higher, but much more difficult to take, since it would require an exceptional opportunity--would be to become, like his great-uncle, a venerated saint.

The progress of Caponsacchi's self-idealization reflects this dual model of glory. Before he sees Pompilia, he has focused on (and been confined to) a search for the first kind of glory, for he lacks a suitable project through which he could reveal himself as his "higher" idealized self. His discovery of Pompilia and her plight exposes the contradictory elements of his dual idealized self, so that he undergoes a period of inner conflict, but it also offers him what seems a golden opportunity to live out his loftiest vision of his own sainthood--which

seems loftier yet because to it is added the risk of losing his chance of attaining the less lofty but surer glory. Caponsacchi's "conversion" (the activation of his higher search for glory) and his decision to arrange Pompilia's escape thus are not moves toward his real self, but moves away from it.

In his flight with Pompilia, he leaves behind his former, less lofty neurotic project--that of maintaining the idealized self that entitles him to a bishopric--and embraces the greater project of proving himself a glorious, saintly martyr in the cause of the Blessed Virgin Pompilia. In the process of flight, his dream of glory seems to be coming true; for a time, he feels completely identified with his great-uncle-emulating idealized self. The partial failure of his project because of Guido's intervention and the ambiguous outcome of the adultery trial shakes but does not destroy this identification. As a result, the man who goes into temporary exile at Civita remains a hero by his own lights and in the light of psychological theory, a splendidly detailed exemplification of the Browning narcissist as hero.

I

Caponsacchi's account of his family background and of his life up until the momentous occasion when he first sees Pompilia reveals a good deal about the origins and dynamics of his defense system. Like Guido, Caponsacchi takes pride in the history and social status of his family (Altick and Loucks 55 note this parallel and others), identifying himself as "a younger son o' the House / Oldest now, greatest once, in my birth-town / Arezzo," where, he says, "I recognize no equal . . ."

(6.222-24). He traces the family history from its beginning in "Fiesole, that rings still with the fame / Of Capo-in-Sacco our progenitor," noting that "Our arms are those of Fiesole itself" and that another great family there is only "a branch" of his (6.229-30, 236-38). Fiesole was later "ruined" by Florence, but Caponsacchi emphasizes that his family "Flourished" after they "Migrated to the victor-city," erecting a "palace" and a "tower . . . / In the Old Mercato" (6.231-34). The casual tone of his remark that "this was years ago, / Four hundred, full" (6.234-35) actually emphasizes the prestigious length of the family's history; and Caponsacchi's self-correction--the figure of four hundred "wants fourteen just" (6.235)--indicates that he is not mildly interested in the broad outlines of the story. He has it on the tip of his tongue in minute detail.

He claims that he only mentions his family's status and success "for a reason"--to prove that he was not "thrust into the Church, because / O' the piece of bread one gets there" (6.226-28); but that remark, combined with his statement that his family has "no equal" in Arezzo, places him above Guido and subtly contrasts his position with that of poor people--like Guido--who need the church to support them financially. His surface attitude of relative indifference to his family's status not only allows him to differentiate himself from his inferiors and to assert his untainted motives; it also exalts his status further by implying that he is unused to mentioning it: ordinarily he would not need to assert his position, since everyone knows it. By disowning family pride, Caponsacchi confirms that he has grounds for a great deal of it.

Added to Caponsacchi's consciousness of "the advantage of [his] birth / I' the way of the world" (6.240-41) is his consciousness of one particular ancestor, his "father's brother's brother," "that's loved and looked to as a saint / Still in Arezzo, he was bishop of, / Sixty years since" (6.254, 243-45). This great-uncle, a model of Christian attitudes and behavior, gave all "His bishop's-revenue" to "the poor, / And used to tend the needy and the sick, / Barefoot, because of his humility" (6.246-48). The high point of his career, however, came in a far more conspicuous arena. When Arezzo was about to be destroyed by "the Granduke Ferdinand," the bishop "availed by prayers and tears / To pacify the Duke and save the town" (6.249-55). Thus the spiritual power of goodness and meekness, embodied in the blessed peacemaker, triumphed over the secular power of military might and wealth, embodied in the proud Granduke. No wonder Caponsacchi takes special pride in his connection with this remarkable bishop.

Because of the family's prominence and its connection with a sainted ancestor, Caponsacchi says, he "was . . . proposed for priest" (6.241)--and was led to think of his future career as a potential replay of the bishop's:

> You see,
> For his sake, how it was I had a right
> To the self-same office, bishop in the egg,
> So, grew i' the garb and prattled in the school,
> Was made expect, from infancy almost,
> The proper mood o' the priest. . . . (6.256-61)

Slinn is putting it mildly to say that Caponsacchi's family "nurtured" his "early identity as a priest" (118). In the ways that Alice Miller describes, his family selected his vocation and laid out his life in accordance with some ends of their own--"political" ones, Michael G.

Yetman believes (10)--and then set about fitting him into the pattern they had chosen. These others chose an identity for him and offered it to him as a substitute for his real self. Even more than Guido, whose position as oldest son has been invoked to limit his life choices, Caponsacchi--"a younger son o' the House" (6.222) without the secure role of the heir--has had to make himself into a person who fills the place his family allots to him. He insists he was not "thrust into the Church" (6.227), but he protests too much; his choice of vocation was still a less than free transaction, for he was raised to exchange his real self for an idealized image others gave him.

The influence of Caponsacchi's great-uncle upon this idealized image has imparted to him the model of a life lived for others, in a tone of perpetual self-effacement. But the priest's relationship to this model has not produced in him a simple "identification" (Yetman 11) with self-effacing values: the bishop's way of living, as seen in retrospect, promises to yield a desirable pay-off. Caponsacchi has experienced his great-uncle as a figure not only powerful in the church in the past, but also "loved and looked to as a saint" (6.243) in the present, a figure so venerated by his admiring worshippers that "For his sake," simply by having the magical power of being the descendant chosen by the family to follow in the bishop's footsteps, Caponsacchi "ha[s] a right / To the self-same office" (6.257-58). The grand-nephew is already "bishop in the egg" (6.258), and need only hatch out to become a bishop. Insofar as this idealized image is conferred upon the child Caponsacchi, his development is bound to be narcissistic, and his task the narcissist's task: not to become his idealized self, but to

maintain his identification with it. Thus he can "expect . . . / The proper mood o' the priest" (6.260-61); success in that way of life will just come to him. And so will the position of bishop; by "right" (6.257) he is entitled to it--because he is who he is. The boy Caponsacchi gives up his real self, but receives in return the promise of prestige, power, and continual confirmation that tells him he may take this life as his birthright.

Caponsacchi's narcissism is complicated, however, by the fact that though he can benefit from his ancestor's magic sainthood simply by going through the right motions, he can see by observing others' attitude toward his great-uncle that it would be even better to have that magic, that love and adulation and potency. Like so many of Browning's characters, Caponsacchi most cherishes the fantasy of being in the center of a circle of admirers, the object of their worship, nourished continually by their praise and love. In order to make this fantasy come true, to attain this higher triumph, Caponsacchi knows he would have to move beyond claims of entitlement into emulation of his great-uncle: he would have to be humble, sacrifice himself, and in some great moment, exhibit the "daring and holiness" (Phipps 269) his ancestor showed in "sav[ing] the town" (6.255). He would have to strive and to do something great (but do it humbly) in order to get the ultimate audience response he desires.

The combination of influences upon the boy Caponsacchi produces, then, a dual idealized image, both aspects of which revolve around the narcissistic pay-off of an admiring audience. Caponsacchi is unusually "capable of change" (Armstrong, "Note" 271)--called conversion at the

thematic level--just because this duality in his self-idealization allows him to shift from one emphasis to the other without abandoning his basic narcissistic position. The birthright image, which he can easily maintain, offers power and prominence; it is typically expansive. The length of time he must serve in a subordinate position before he will hatch into a bishop does not seem to have entered the boy's calculations. The emulative image would be much more difficult to exhibit, but far more special: few people take the risks that saints take--or receive the worship they receive. Given the opportunity, of course, sainthood might come quickly; but to be ready for the occasion, Caponsacchi must be able to exhibit self-effacing qualities such as humility and perfectionistic qualities such as preoccupation with high standards. To keep open the possibility of identifying openly with his emulative idealized image, then, Caponsacchi must not allow himself to drift naturally from priesthood to bishopric and must not too much enjoy the easily obtained benefits of entitlement. Not to enjoy them at all, however, would spoil the narcissistic pleasures entitlement holds out.

Altogether, Caponsacchi's dual self-idealization is potentially a source of conflict between the surer thing (his rise through the ranks of the church) and the greater thing (his rise to the status of saint). His self-effacing great-uncle did not have to choose between the two and probably encountered no significant psychological conflicts in the course of his career; but it may not be so for Caponsacchi, whose early narcissistic relationship to his world leaves him with both enormous claims for effortless achievement and an enormous appetite for

overwhelming confirmation that he cannot get without the effort involved in the strategies of self-effacement and perfectionism.

The potential instability of Caponsacchi's self-idealization manifests itself as he approaches his first vows. Until now he has been living in the expansive narcissistic mode of his birthright image, going "trippingly" along his way (6.266). The vows mean, however, that the emphasis must shift: they demand difficult things of him such as renunciation and self-purification, a "leap / . . . into the other life" (6.264-65). Caponsacchi is "awe-struck" (6.268) by these demands, saying to his bishop,

> "How shall holiest flesh
> "Engage to keep such vow inviolate,
> "How much less mine? I know myself too weak,
> "Unworthy! Choose a worthier stronger man!"
> (6.268-71)

Several interpretations of this response are possible. It has been seen as stemming from genuine insight into the disparity between his actual self and the high ideal represented by the vows (Yetman 11; Litzinger 29), that is, as reflecting genuine "humility" (McGhee 87); and I think such insight may well be at least partially responsible for Caponsacchi's hesitation. Though he is already quite self-alienated and is already involved in a search for glory whose ultimate goal is no less impossible than the vows' ideal, there is a great difference between a largely unconscious search for glory, with its accompanying fantasies of glorious achievements to be pulled off at some indefinite future time (perhaps after some indefinite but not overly long period of vaguely conceived efforts), and an expectation that really exists in the external world for some real action that will cause genuine

inconvenience or even sacrifice--an action at some definite time in the near future through which one will actually accomplish the glorious impossible of one's fantasy life. The expectation itself is extremely high or unrealistic or both, so that even a relatively much healthier person would have qualms about being able to fulfill it; but a neurotic person faced with that same expectation--with a real-life test of his or her self-idealization--not only is consciously threatened by the external consequences of not measuring up, but also is unconsciously menaced by terrible psychological consequences of failure such as self-hate. Panic is one possible response to this situation, and I think Caponsacchi's backing away from the test represented by the vows is in part an effort to avoid a crisis in which the message of fallibility and limitation that his actual self is trying to send him would overcome the voice of his self-idealizing imagination.

Another element at work in Caponsacchi's retreat from his vows may be that being required to take the vows everyone takes to enter the priesthood--and then being expected to live up to them--threatens to violate his narcissistic claims and hurt his pride. His retrospective account of this episode reflects no conscious awareness that his pride may have been at stake, but then, to see that possibility would hurt his pride. He unwittingly reveals that his pride was threatened, however, when he describes the episode by drawing an analogy between himself and a person who has "trippingly" ascended "up to the height / O'er the wan water" and now must "leap / Over the ledge into the other life" (6.264-67). What seems to be just a fancy way of saying it is time to take the plunge carries connotations of being in danger of

falling from the heights and suggests fear of committing a suicidal act. According to Horney, fear "of falling from heights is a frequent expression of the dread of falling from the heights of illusory grandeur" (NHG 31). To take the vows, as we have seen, would commit Caponsacchi to a difficult task that would expose him to that very risk. Because the narcissist feels that (s)he is the idealized self, a task involving such a risk would be psychologically suicidal.

Finally, Caponsacchi's "protestation" that he is "'too weak, / 'Unworthy!'" (6.273, 270-71) probably signals that feeling his idealized self threatened makes him feel helpless and activates his suppressed self-effacing trends. This development leads to complications, of course, for when it happens, he can really get into humility and self-minimization; he feels like his saintly great-uncle. His "higher" emulative idealized self now seems closer to actualization; and when he expresses the perfectionistic value of "keep[ing] such vow inviolate" (6.269) and the self-effacing attitude of saying he is not good enough, the effect is dramatic: "the very bishop" (6.272) comes to his rescue. Already Caponsacchi's fear of losing his audience's attention is beginning to be assuaged.

The bishop has not won the hearts and minds of Browning critics, but it may at least be said of him that he possesses exceptional psychological insight into the nature of Caponsacchi's crisis and into what will resolve it in favor of his taking the vows after all. The bishop first moves to redefine the vows so as to reassure Caponsacchi that they do not really represent a test of his self-idealization. Caponsacchi has been reading them wrong: "'I satisfy thee there's an

easier sense / 'Wherein to take such vow than suits the first / 'Rough rigid reading. Mark what makes all smooth . . .'" (6.276-78). Here is a bishop who takes seriously the injunction to "Speak . . . comfortably" to his people and to make "the rough places plain" (Isaiah 40: 2, 4). According to the bishop, the vows must be read as "'a new word that means the very same'" but allows the person taking it to "'slide'" "'o'er the hard place . . . with a smile'" (6.288-89). Caponsacchi has been seeing the vow as a rocky cliff from which he must fling himself; now his bishop turns it into a sliding board that "'makes all smooth'" (6.278). "Every mountain and hill shall be made low" (Isaiah 40: 4).

Shrewdly recognizing that the vows threaten Caponsacchi's pride and implicitly violate his narcissistic claims that nothing should be expected of him, that everything should be easy, and that his exceptional status should be recognized and admired, the bishop gives them a revisionist reading (cf. Slinn 118) that honors Caponsacchi's claims and feeds his pride. Effortlessness is to be the rule for Caponsacchi: "'Nobody wants you in these latter days / 'To prop the Church by breaking your backbone . . .'" (6.291-92). It will be his role to be an ornament to the church (6.297-99). Nothing could be easier; but what of the importance of this role? According to the bishop, it is very important--because Caponsacchi is such an exceptional person: he is "'the pick o' the earth . . . , / 'Not its offscouring'"; he is not "'a rubble-stone / 'Unfit for the front o' the building'" but "'porphyry for the prominent place'"; he is not "'ragged run-away Onesimus'" (a servant), but "'King Agrippa'" (6.311-30).

Thus the bishop appeals to Caponsacchi's pride in his social status and affirms his sense of entitlement and specialness. The bishop may not restore Caponsacchi's soul, but he certainly salves his pride.

The bishop apparently perceives that he must dampen Caponsacchi's dangerous enthusiasm for a saintly role, for he offers another role that will appease his need to do what is good while appealing to him more. The bishop assures Caponsacchi that the church no longer needs "'martyrs and confessors'" (6.296); these roles are obsolete. The bishop thus deflects the demands of Caponsacchi's self-effacing and perfectionistic trends by telling him that traditionally defined sanctity would not be useful. He offers Caponsacchi a substitute role calculated to pacify his wish to be seen and admired in the role of glorious service and conspicuous self-abnegation:

> "We profit as you were the painfullest
> "O' the martyrs, and you prove yourself a match
> "For the cruelest confessor ever was,
> "If you march boldly up and take your stand
> "Where their blood soaks, their bones yet strew
> the soil,
> "And cry 'Take notice, I the young and free
> "'And well-to-do i' the world, thus leave the
> world,
> "'Cast in my lot thus with no gay young world
> "'But the grand old Church: she tempts me of
> the two!'
> "Renounce the world? Nay, keep and give it us!
> "Let us have you, and boast of what you bring."
> (6.300-10)

What had seemed a terrifying fall into obscurity is here represented as a public performance complete with audience, stage setting, a dramatic entrance, and--for solo utterance center-stage--some splendid lines in which assertion of superior status is sanctified by devotion to "'"the grand old Church"'" (6.308). The star performer

will be empowered to give the world to the church, and the church in turn will "'boast'" about his performance. The taking of vows is envisioned as only the first of many triumphs; Caponsacchi will continue to be a cynosure as he exhibits his "'superior gift . . . / 'Of making madrigals'" or composing "'a Marinesque Adoniad'"; and he will continue to gain critical acclaim as the bishop (here cast in a supporting role) leads the audience's applause (6.331-36).

The bishop's reinterpretation of the vows in a way that satisfies Caponsacchi's needs all but guarantees the younger man's acquiescence. He is not "forced . . . into the role" (Gridley, "Browning's Caponsacchi" 284), nor does he assume it as "an all-or-nothing" reaction (Armstrong, "Note" 273). He finds that the bishop's "terms [have] changed all" (6.336) because he is "good enough" for the revised role already: he need not put forth effort or risk a devastating failure; he can fulfill his role and "still hold head erect," his pride in his superiority preserved (6.337-38).

Such a delicate balance as the bishop has induced in Caponsacchi cannot easily be maintained in a living psyche, and Caponsacchi's account of the several years between his taking the vows and his first seeing Pompilia reflects a mixture of satisfaction and frustration that keeps him not at peace, but in a state of uneasy suspension. He is the socially successful priest that the bishop has predicted he would be (6.371-72) and is rewarded with the popularity and attention to which he feels entitled. His favored position offers substantial narcissistic sustenance in the present and seems very likely to lead him on to high position and considerable political power.

At the same time, however, some aspects of Caponsacchi's success nibble at his expansive pride. His conception of himself as "bishop in the egg" (6.258) involves a claim of effortless hatching and development into top bird (perhaps a cardinal); but in fact he has to work rather hard to carry out both the minimal demands of his priestly role and the many demands of his social life. His exploits are rather petty, and to carry them out he must be obsequious and adapt himself to the desires of others. These conditions violate his claims for an immediate preeminence that would require others to adapt to his desires.

More troublesome, in exchange for the starring role that the bishop has given him, Caponsacchi must pay the price of a humiliating off-stage reality: the bishop is producer, director, scriptwriter, and stage manager for every performance. When Caponsacchi appears as leading man opposite two countesses, the bishop is in the wings telling him how to divide his attention between them; when Caponsacchi is inclined to play a preacher, the bishop switches him into the role of archbishop's flatterer; and when that show closes, the bishop puts him in rehearsals for the next one, drilling him on his lines, coaching him on every gesture, and planning his every move on stage (6.350-64, 380-88). It is Caponsacchi's job to act "According to prescription," "Conform[ing]" himself to every "hint / Benignant" from the bishop (6.343-44, 351-52). He does represent himself as a man "passively being pushed" (Wilt 352), but the tone of that self-presentation--its impatience, its satiric edge, its "contemptuous" attitude (Sullivan 79) toward the bishop--strikes me as expressing openly what he hid at the

time: resentment that he had to be passive and subordinate, that he had to obey orders, and that in doing so, he incurred a debt to the bishop who made him a star. The very roles that bring Caponsacchi much confirmation from the audience out front also wound his pride because behind the scenes, the bishop is waiting to confront him with more expectations. The intensified dynamics of the narcissistic bind thus eat away at Caponsacchi's pleasure in his successes.

To make matters worse, his prospects for a glory unmixed with humiliating dependence on the bishop's approval are dimmed by the apparent absence of appreciation of or opportunity for the kind of emulative triumph he most covets. The bishop advises him against any exhibition of the self-effacing and perfectionistic values of his emulative idealized image (6.344-46, 365-67) and ridicules such behavior in others (6.373-85). The bishop holds up only the prospect of becoming a bigger and better performer for the cardinal in "'Rome-- . . . the eventual harbor'" (6.368-69). Nothing in his present life or the foreseeable future promises Caponsacchi an opportunity to break out of a pattern in which his sense of entitlement is continually compromised by the bishop's domination; his need for a great project emulating his great-uncle's sacrifice is made to seem ridiculous in the context of the values espoused by the religious and secular hierarchies; and his underlying self-effacing and perfectionistic trends, which are to be reconciled with his predominant narcissism only within the emulative idealized self, are continually aroused by his involvement with priestly duties but thwarted by the demand that he limit that involvement to minimal, superficial gestures.

At this point in his career, Caponsacchi's frustrations are not to be equated with those of a person who is being prevented by external forces from actualizing his real self. He has accepted the bishop's definition of him as a special case and has taken his vows because the bishop's "terms" (6.336) appealed to him. Though he later acknowledges that he was "A fribble and a coxcomb" at this period (6.340), neither his description of what he felt and thought at the time nor his retrospective view of that period disowns the bishop's persuasively inflated estimate of Caponsacchi's inherent social and personal superiority, as we might expect would be the case if his self-estimate differed substantially from the bishop's--that is, if it were based on a clearsighted view of his actual self rather than on identification with his idealized one. Caponsacchi would probably agree with Boyd Litzinger's assessment that he is "too good for the priesthood" (31), but in fact--given that his actual self is corrupt (Buckler 134)--what is "too good" is his idealized self.

Thus it is not entirely fair to say only that the bishop and his like "deceived" Caponsacchi into taking his vows and then prevented his "functioning as a priest" (Litzinger 31), for his preexisting defense system made it possible for the bishop to get him to take his vows and perform as a worldly priest. Caponsacchi was not so much "led . . . astray" (Sullivan 79) as he was allowed to continue on his chosen path to glory. Similarly, though his "identification" with his great-uncle has made him dissatisfied with "the priestly life" he is expected to lead (Yetman 11), the main reason for this lies in the connection of that identification with an idealized self so lofty that even an

abundance of special attention and privileges does not offer enough for that imagined self. Until he encounters Pompilia, Caponsacchi is frustrated largely because Arezzo presents no arena for him to act out, before an appropriate and adoring audience, the saintly role he has appropriated and rehearsed for so long in his imagination.

II

The foregoing analysis of Caponsacchi's psychological situation when he first sees and hears about Pompilia goes far toward explaining why he is "ripe for heroics" (Yetman 12) and why they find in Pompilia a suitable object. He has been living a suspended life (cf. Nelson 95; Wilt 352; Yetman 10) tending toward the detachment reflected in his remark that he "Found [him]self at the theatre one night / . . . in a mood and mind / Proper enough for the place, amused or no . . ." (6.395-97). He seems to be trying to wall off the demands of his narcissistic grandiosity by distancing himself from the outside world and from his feelings ("amused or no," he looks on as a spectator) and by letting himself drift (finding himself in a place) in hopes of eluding his relentless narcissistic urges.

His detachment is precarious, however, for he is internally torn between his need for such narcissistic gratification as he gets from his role as church ornament and his impulse to act out his suppressed resentment of and contempt for the members of the church hierarchy by whom he is manipulated and toward whom he must be subservient. As the Pope realizes, Caponsacchi exemplifies "youth prolonged, though age [is] ripe" (10.1130)--ripe for independence, for a dramatic break with the will of his "fathers," which has placed him in his present

uncomfortable position. In his family, he adapted himself to his elders' program for him; his relationship to the bishop has reconstituted the same situation. In general, too, his vows have committed him to a lengthy professional childhood, and once he is a full-fledged priest, his life will still be shaped by his subordination to a hierarchy of fathers: bishop, archbishop, cardinal, Pope. Insofar as this set of circumstances both thwarts his search for glory and interferes with his attempts to detach himself from it, Caponsacchi needs to rebel--not in order to actualize his real self, for he is alienated from it, but in order to exhibit the spiritual greatness of his saintly idealized self. Thus he is seeking a kind of heroism that would achieve this great triumph and at the same time separate him from the supervisory will of his "fathers."

It is already clear, too, that to achieve his great triumph, Caponsacchi must find a great project involving someone who can give him extraordinary confirmation. More popularity with Arezzo's most prominent people certainly cannot fulfill his drive to separate himself from their authority or sate his desire for the highest approval.

Given these needs of Caponsacchi's, it is not surprising that the sight of Pompilia provides exactly the "stimulation" (Yetman 12) to stir up his desire to rise above the ordinary and attain spiritual greatness. She immediately strikes him as "young, tall, [and] beautiful," but also as "strange and sad" (6.399). Set apart from the mood of the surrounding activity and set above him in Guido's box (6.981, 1009) and suddenly revealed, "Lofty and lone," like "the Rafael" painting when it was uncrated "on the high-altar" in the

"cathedral" (6.405-06, 400), Pompilia seems intriguing, mysterious, aloof, unavailable. At the same time, her strangeness and sadness in the midst of the theater's Carnival atmosphere (7.951) betoken to Caponsacchi that she is in some way akin to him, out of tune or discordant with Arezzo's social scene as he himself is. Because he knows nothing about her and yet feels connected to her, Caponsacchi can easily project onto her the qualities of the idealized female figure with whom he immediately associates her: the Blessed Virgin.

The significance of this association is complex. No doubt the sexual element in Caponsacchi's reaction to Pompilia (Armstrong, "Note" 275; Hoerner 42) threatens his ambitious desire to attain the highest degree of spirituality. Not because his sexual response rules him (Slinn 118) but because he cannot allow it to, he can consciously experience Pompilia only at a double remove. By "turn[ing] . . . Venus . . . / Into Madonna's shape," as the Pope puts it (10.1118-21), Caponsacchi first places Pompilia at a religious remove, transforming his attraction to her into a feeling of which he can approve: "religious zeal" (Armstrong, "Note" 275). The imputation of perpetual virginity to Pompilia further reassures Caponsacchi that his own virtue is safe: her purity guarantees his. (The importance of this defense is reflected later in Caponsacchi's inability to acknowledge that Pompilia actually has a child [King, Focusing Artifice 148]). He reinforces his self-insurance by placing Pompilia-as-Blessed Virgin at a second remove, seeing her aesthetically. Conceiving of her as a living picture, an image, means that he experiences her appropriately

by looking at her--he becomes "one stare"--and is in relationship with her if she simply "'give[s him] back [his] gaze'" (6.406-07).

The Blessed Virgin association thus not only deflects the potential sexual element in Caponsacchi's relationship to Pompilia, but also defines the mode of their relationship, from Caponsacchi's point of view at least, as predominantly narcissistic. Caponsacchi looks up to the Mother figure, and is confirmed when she "turn[s], / Look[s]" at him, and "smile[s] the beautiful sad strange smile" (6.411-12). He has evidently received the narcissist's reward, approval; but further, the reward has come to a man whose mother "'died [when he] was born'" (6.1230), from the image of the ideal mother whose "'soft' virtues of love, kindness, tenderness, sympathy, and purity" (Gridley, "Browning's Caponsacchi" 286) are the perfections of the earliest idealized parent imago in the prototypical confirmatory relationship that the narcissistic adult compulsively seeks to recapture.

We have no information about who mothered Caponsacchi or how, so it is not possible to say whether inadequate mothering has left him with a particularly strong, specific craving for confirmation by someone whom he can perceive as ideal and mother-like. However, Caponsacchi recalls the arrival of the Raphael madonna as an emotional highlight (6.400-06), and Canon Conti, who knows Caponsacchi rather well, has evidently noted his friend's yearning for an exclusive relationship to such a figure (7.1323-25).

Also suggestive of a specific hunger for a mother's narcissistic confirmation is Caponsacchi's lingering first impression of Pompilia's "gaze . . . / Burnt to my brain, as sunbeam through shut eyes," and her

"smile," which is "not once changed" (6.434-36). The association of Pompilia with being looked at and shone on warmly, without change, suggests that Caponsacchi perceives her in terms of a fantasy fulfillment of the small child's need to live always in the light of "the gleam in the mother's eye" (Kohut, "Forms" 252)--in a situation of being continually looked at with smiling maternal warmth. Caponsacchi's later dislike of Pompilia's idea that he might be "'serv[ing]'" her as he "'used to serve'" his mother (6.1230-34) may stem in part from his uneasy suppression of a need for mothering approval (see Cook 129 for another interpretation); indeed, his continuing insistence that Pompilia really was the Virgin's spiritual equal may serve less to deny sexual attraction to her than to deny to himself his powerful but regressive attraction to Pompilia as a mother for the needy child in him. Most of all, of course, he must protect his instantaneous idealization of Pompilia, for it makes her the truly exceptional figure for whom he might rise above the constraints of his limited Aretine life to pursue some glorious project--and from whom confirmation of his glory would be supremely meaningful.

The sight of Pompilia thus stirs Caponsacchi's imagination, stunning him into a version of the narcissist's in-love state described by Rothstein, wherein the priest invests perfection in Pompilia as the object, then takes her perfection into himself. Conti's account of Pompilia's situation "reinforce[s]" (Buckler 137) this phenomenon by painting her as an appropriate object for some kind of rescue. Guido is in Conti's view a sort of devil whose baleful look at Pompilia's canon-admirers prompts Conti to urge "'Prudence, for

God's love!'" (6.418-31). His casting Pompilia as the imperiled heroine and Guido as a tyrant makes Guido a suitable challenge to a would-be hero's prowess.

That Pompilia is married, so that according to convention she may be courted in fun but not rescued in earnest makes the idea of playing some heroic role in her behalf not only noble, but rebellious--something that Caponsacchi might do to separate from the bishop and others like him who condition their approval upon his conformity. In Caponsacchi's conscious mind, no doubt their script now seems "incompatible" with the "true role" he feels has been revealed in his vision of Pompilia (Gridley, "Browning's Caponsacchi" 284-85). But the consistency of all this revelation with Caponsacchi's long-held fantasies of gaining triumph and adulation by actualizing his emulative idealized image suggests that critics' talk of his being spiritually ordained rests upon their acceptance of his now-activated view of himself as "the anointed, the man of destiny" (NHG 194). He has for some time been "psychologically ready for conversion" (Armstrong, "Note" 273)--that is, for response to a call to glory; and the next installment in his story is most essentially an account of a man who, having almost completely lost touch with his real self and having thus fallen entirely into identification with a false self, has trouble even deciding exactly where his path to glory lies.

III

With his emulative ambitions roused by his transformation of Pompilia into the stuff of his dreams, Caponsacchi faces a period when his need for a glory beyond that to which he feels entitled becomes

more intense. His efforts to pursue it grow more complicated, however, as his dreams encounter a resistant reality that requires him to choose between the benefits of entitlement and his emulative life plan. Torn by conflicts within and between the clusters of values and shoulds associated with each, he eventually "decides" his course of action--taking Pompilia to Rome--when the balance of conflicting impulses is tipped by Pompilia's reciprocal idealization of him. Energized by her confirmation, his grandiose self catapults him toward the "tick of time" when he gives his orders to the driver and springs into the carriage "beside her" (6.1150-51).

Guido's refusal to let Caponsacchi call on Pompilia, relayed by Conti the evening after the theater episode, intensifies her image in the priest's imagination. Simply because "his knowledge of Pompilia" is (and continues to be) so limited (Sullivan 84-85), he can preserve and augment his fantasy of her as he needs to. Conti's report that Guido "'beats'" Pompilia and that "'She's breaking her heart quite fast enough'" already (6.445-46) effectively bars Caponsacchi from finding a way to see her and fuels his desire to rescue her. Conti's remarks also fuel a second process through which Caponsacchi builds an image of Guido as both a formidable villain in relation to Pompilia, and, in relation to Caponsacchi, a contemptible inferior who presumes to thwart the priest's desire to meet Pompilia. Though Conti urges Caponsacchi to "'be . . . rational'" and continue his superficial social games (6.447-51), his report guarantees that Caponsacchi will respond to separation from Pompilia and to his inaction relative to her plight by thinking of her continually, by integrating her into his dreams of

glory, and by judging his actual life more and more from the elevated standpoint of his fantasy.

Predictably enough, his real life suffers by comparison: "ere the week [is] out," he feels that the women he knows "'would make a dog sick'" or "'drive a cat mad,'" and all his usual activities seem "'but poor work'" (6.452-55). He looks forward to Lent, when he can spend more time in church; meantime, instead of dining with the archbishop, he haunts the cathedral where the Raphael madonna hangs (Cook 123). Despite the real corruption of his social world, the intensity of his revulsion from it is unusual and distressing because his sole object, for the sake of which he is willing to relegate everything and everyone else to his emotional ash heap, is neither the real Blessed Virgin (that is, the Blessed Virgin as she may be said to exist within a widely shared devotional tradition) nor even the real Pompilia, but rather his own fantasy. Caponsacchi has turned away from the world to worship an idol--an extension of himself. Thus it is true, as Hassett says, that Caponsacchi's seeing Pompilia "puts him in touch with his ideal self" (129) and that, as Roy E. Gridley argues, his imaginative perception of her "creates a symbol . . . to which he can respond with . . . adoration and . . . love" ("Browning's Caponsacchi" 281). Unlike these critics, however, I would argue that what has happened is not a spiritual conversion, but an attempt to convert himself and Pompilia into the larger-than-life figures who inhabit his dreams of glory.

The vulnerability of Caponsacchi's dream-worshipping piety becomes evident when, pressed by his bishop to explain his new penchant for "'play[ing] truant in church all day long'" (6.472), he

narrowly escapes alienating his mentor with a sudden announcement that he plans to go to Rome. Caponsacchi seems to want to rebel against the controlling bishop and against his lack of opportunity for greatness; he seems also to wish to escape the pressure to live in relation to the external world rather than in relation to his own thoughts: he wants to "'live alone, . . . / 'And look into [his] heart a little'" (6.480-81). Yetman argues that the priest wants to escape "unconscious guilt" about being "attract[ed] to" Pompilia (14). I think, however, that Caponsacchi is driven more by his wish to continue living in the presence of the Pompilia in his mind. Alone in Rome, he would have himself and his version of Pompilia as an absolutely reliable fantasy audience, whereas in Arezzo, in relation to real others, he would be constantly exposed to the possibility of being chided for his inadequate socializing.

Going to Rome, then, represents his best opportunity to preserve and enlarge--in imagination, of course--his emulative idealized self. At the same time, leaving Arezzo before friction alienates him from his bishop will allow Caponsacchi to hold in reserve the possibility of living out his birthright life plan. Finally, going away will allow him to detach himself from the conflict between his impulse to get his pride fed by conforming to the bishop's and others' expectations and his impulse to feed his own pride by rising above the expectations of these inferior people (cf. Yetman 14). In the meantime, he tries to preserve his dreams of glory in such solitude as he can maintain in Arezzo.

The problem he encounters is that solitary "mus[ing]" (6.483) keeps his idealized image constantly before him, constantly "show[s] the gap 'twixt what is, what should be" (6.487). Comparing the first to the second, he feels he has fallen into an "abysm" (6.488) by failing to rise to the heights of spiritual grandeur. He has "Le[ft] aspiration here, achievement there, / Lacking omnipotence to connect extremes" (6.489-90)--to move from his actual to his idealized self. He feels "utterly dissociated" from Pompilia, whose situation is the one "instance to the point" that could fill his need to aspire and achieve (6.492, 494). Caponsacchi's sense of being wasted has much truth to it, and his concern for Pompilia is as genuine as it can be under the circumstances; but what is "Eating" at him (6.496) is primarily his need to "relieve [him]self" (6.499) from his frustration at having no opportunity to become his idealized self. That is why, as Nelson says, "rescuing Pompilia" would be "rescu[ing] himself" (94)--but rescuing himself from his self-contempt at having fallen short of his emulative self-idealization.

At this juncture, Guido's mistress-maid delivers an invitation to a tryst, purportedly from Pompilia; the maid observes that "'the lady suffers much'" (6.523). The letter itself is so foreign to Caponsacchi's conception of Pompilia that he immediately attributes it to "'the jealous miscreant,--Guido's self, / 'Whose mean soul grins through this transparent trick'" (6.536-37). Hearing of Pompilia's suffering, on the other hand, further stirs his dreams of being her rescuer. And the maid is waiting for his answer. Under these conditions he can liberate his expansive trends in his reply, which he

is sure will be taken to Guido: "'What made you . . . / 'Marry your hideous husband? 'Twas a fault, / 'And now you taste the fruit of it. Farewell'" (6.532-34).

Guido's trickery seems to Caponsacchi to justify aggressiveness against him, and the priest's sense of spiritual superiority, so important to his dreams of glory, pours out simultaneously with his nastily vindictive fantasy of Guido's reaction. He conceives of Guido as a stupid, "foul" animal who will be unable to fathom Caponsacchi's cleverly worded letter: "snuff" and "paw" at it as he may, Guido will not be able to decide whether or not he should worry about the man in relation to Pompilia (6.543-47; cf. Cook 123). Caponsacchi further inflates his superiority and revels in a sense of his rapid spiritual progress as he reflects that he has now risen too high to keep the proposed tryst in order to ambush Guido (6.548-56).

Sending the ambiguous letter is indeed by most standards morally preferable to physical violence; but this reaction casts serious doubt both on the depth of his supposed conversion and on the degree of empathy he has for the real woman Pompilia. Caponsacchi's delight in degrading Guido and his pride in himself for engaging in the same sort of devious head games that he despises Guido for playing are far from exhibiting either charity or a realistic assessment of his own shortcomings. And he is blind to the effects that his failure to "'set [Guido's] heart at ease'" (6.542) about his own intentions might have if Guido decides to take out his frustrations on Pompilia.

The second letter escalates Caponsacchi's expansive reaction to Guido. Comically excessive in style and content though it is, the

letter not only challenges Caponsacchi to come, but also reverberates with themes already present in the priest's fantasies. It articulates and justifies his own feelings of confinement in and rebelliousness toward the limits set by social custom and law: "'if I break all bounds, there's reason sure'" (6.568). The reason confirms Caponsacchi's imaginings as to Pompilia's desperate need: "'I am wretched here, a monster tortures me'" (6.570). It pleads for a rescue that he wants and needs to carry out in order to actualize his idealized self, and it suggests a way for him to carry it out without sacrificing his previous plans: "'Are you determinedly bent on Rome?'" the letter asks; "'Carry me with you!'" (6.569, 571). Finally, it reinforces his association of Pompilia with the Blessed Virgin: "'I am ever at the window of my room / Over the terrace, at the Ave'" (6.574). When the Hail Mary is being said, she appears.

All these mirrorings of elements in his search for glory no doubt arouse and crystallize Caponsacchi's aspirations even as they increase his ire at Guido, whose "'foul paw'" (6.547) has somehow grasped them and mauled them into juxtaposition with the trite pastoral rhetoric of Thyrsis and Myrtilla and a tawdry image of Pompilia begging for "'the crumbs'" of his love (6.566). The letter mixes the pure gold of Caponsacchi's idealizations with the dross of Guido's desacralizing imagination, sullying the priest's image of Pompilia and casting an ambiguous light upon the motives for his zeal to rescue her.

Caponsacchi responds ambiguously once more by planting the impression (which he knows will be relayed to Guido) that he is concerned about "'What risk'" Guido poses, yet taking high ground,

sorting out his role as "'a priest'" with "'scruples'" and Pompilia's role as "'wedded wife'" from Guido's role as the "'brute'" among the three (6.598-600). He thus asserts his superiority and retrieves his gold from Guido's garbage. But his need to triumph over Guido by beating him at his own game leads him to add a disquieting note: "'Yet should you really show / 'Sign at the window . . . but nay, best be good!'" (6.600-01).

With the maid gone, Caponsacchi gloats at the thought of how Guido will "'make his heart / 'His food, anticipate hell's worm once more!'" (6.605-06). He imagines that Guido will "'watch shivering at the window'" for him to come, only to "'lour at disappointment in good time!'" (6.607-13). Caponsacchi is not just enjoying "plumbing the depths of [Guido's] villainy" (Sullivan 84); he rejoices in having caused Guido pain and, even more, in his plan to manipulate Guido and the maid into turning upon each other (6.614-17). This plan reflects a fantasy scenario in which Caponsacchi plays God to the two sinners and sends them to hell. His almost delusional certainty that he can bring about the destruction of his enemies, who will be somehow bound to react as he imagines they will, clearly indicates first, that his narcissistic conviction of omnipotence has distorted his perception of reality, and second, that the real Pompilia--who is in fact the enemies' likeliest target if they cannot harm Caponsacchi--has been for the priest largely a projected idealization that is now (temporarily at least) reabsorbed into his own grandiosity.

Caponsacchi continues "For a month" or so (6.619) to transform the real situation into an abstract, shadowy fantasy with his idealized

self as the central figure and Guido and the maid as his adversaries. The letters as Guido's product become "the soft sly adder, endlong 'neath [Caponsacchi's] tread," an image of Satan as the serpent that Christ and Christ-like heroes must trample under their feet; the maid becomes the "'temptress'" who, as the agent of the serpent, purveys "'vain talk'" and "'visions'" (6.620, 633-34). Caponsacchi's idea of Pompilia, his way of construing her, is being tested by what he assumes to be Guido's construction of her; the temptation has become a temptation to believe the letters, the battle an intellectual one between Caponsacchi and Guido from which the priest's original aspiration to rescue Pompilia herself seems to have been displaced. This stalemate must be kept in mind if we are to understand why Caponsacchi is so quick to respond to "a variation": a letter in which Guido's Pompilia-persona warns Caponsacchi that he must not come near her because Guido would probably be lying in wait for him. "'My husband is a formidable foe,'" the letter goes on, and "'Will stick at nothing to destroy you. Stand / 'Prepared, or better, run till you reach Rome!'" (6.641-43).

This letter evokes a new kind of response from Caponsacchi. He no longer stands on his being a priest, saying instead he is "'but a man'" and adding, "'If it should please me pad the path [under Pompilia's window] this eve, / 'Guido will have two troubles, first to get / 'Into a rage and then get out again'" (6.655-57). This is the language of male rivalry at the level that he supposedly is "'not i' the mood'" for any longer (6.556). The change seems not to be solely a matter of his "pride" being "baited" (Yetman 16), for Caponsacchi's pride has

always been active. What has changed is the image of Guido to which he is responding. Conti and the maid have previously painted Guido as a bad but inferior man whom one "'would not hold / 'For Hercules'" (6.441-42). Now, however, Guido is presenting himself in quite a different aspect, and he has come as close as he can, given the mask of the letter, to issuing a formal challenge. He is behaving in reality like the "'formidable'" enemy whose diabolism Caponsacchi has previously succeeded in constructing only in his fantasies. If he is to reveal himself as a great rescuer, he must have such an opponent as Guido now seems to be. The heightening of Guido's stature reinvigorates the priest's dreams of glory and mobilizes him to move against Guido.

Caponsacchi's account of his approach to Guido's palace that night reveals his impulse to pursue aggressively a version of the rescuer's role and his impulse to revitalize his idealization of Pompilia. Since he assumes that Pompilia herself will be kept away from the encounter with Guido, however, his immediate intention is to rescue his image of her from the "long black teasing lie" of Guido's letters. He plans to do the "Madonna service" by defeating her detractor and thus vindicating her. The serpent-versus-Christian hero fantasy controls his thoughts of the anticipated showdown: he expects that "'Kith, kin, and Count'" will attempt "'to bite [his] heel'" when he arrives; but, he vows, "'No mother nor brother viper of the brood / 'Shall scuttle off without the instructive bruise!'" (6.687-90). This "allegoriz[ing]" has been rightly explained as Caponsacchi's way of bringing reality into harmony with his feelings and impulses (Yetman

16; cf. Gridley, "Browning's Caponsacchi" 290, 282; Nelson 95). From a Horneyan point of view, this harmonizing is explicable as the creation of an imagined reality that casts spiritual glamor--consistent with the priest's idealized image--on what is actually the rather trite situation of a December-May marriage complicated by a younger man.

The glamorizing light focuses on Caponsacchi, of course, who, in the role of God's servant (or Christ) bruising the head of Satan, is fully justified in releasing his vindictive aggression against the husband and his party. Beyond that, the cosmic significance of this act, as he has allegorized it, transforms it into a means of revealing himself to be his emulative idealized self--a transformation that is no small accomplishment when one considers what Caponsacchi (planning his performance) actually intends to do. Making his entrance and standing beneath Pompilia's window as if to do a bit of serenading (6.691-95), he will instead deliver these lines:

> "'Out of the hole you hide in, on to the front,
> "'Count Guido Franceschini, show yourself!
> "'Hear what a man thinks of a thing like you,
> "'And after, take this foulness in your face!'"
> (6.697-700)

Here he will spit on Guido. He can hardly wait, starting "to laugh already" (6.696). Such a Christian hero as this needs all the illusions of holiness that he can muster.

With his intended "words . . . living on [his] lip," Caponsacchi rounds the last corner and sees the one person he did not expect: "there at the window stood, / Framed in its black square length, with lamp in hand, / Pompilia . . ." (6.701-04). It is a view of her as surprising and visually dramatic as his first, in the theater; and when

he looks up at her, as before, his interpretation of what he sees is once more in terms of a picture of the Blessed Virgin: "Our Lady of all the Sorrows," with her "great, grave, griefful air" (6.707, 704). This time, however, Caponsacchi's impulse to kneel to his idealized self-object--who quickly disappears--is in competition with his active aggressive impulses toward Guido and his party, who, he feels sure, have "'used her for a snare'" (6.707-17). This thought has increased his determination to fight when Pompilia "reappear[s]; / . . . on the terrace overhead," she is now "So close above [him], she could almost touch / [His] head if she bent down . . ." (6.720-23). At this moment, abuzz with the hostile speeches and violent actions he has been mentally rehearsing, Caponsacchi suddenly perceives in reality the possibility of receiving Pompilia's gesture of blessing.

This sudden availability of the idealized woman herself favors the dominance of the priest's desire to merge with Pompilia, his idealized self-object; he is now "still as stone, all eye, all ear" (6.724), receptive to her attitudes. And from Pompilia's point of view, how fortunate this change is, for as Hassett has aptly said, she "must . . . rescue her rescuer" (45)--not in the moral sense, however, but in the psychological one. With Pompilia unavailable, Caponsacchi has lost sight of the reality of her position and has become obsessed with her "name" and with Guido's taking it in vain in the letters written in Pompilia's "name." He has come to do battle against Guido's foul words, for Pompilia's good name; and he has intended a planned speech to be his major weapon. He is entangled in the trading of insults with Guido and in the allegorizing of reality to suit his fantasies, and as

a result is largely under the control of Guido's fantasies and his own. Pompilia must rescue him from these ill-focused fantasies and get him into some orderly relationship with her personal existence if he is to be capable of doing anything more than calling names. Caponsacchi also needs rescue from the globalized anger in which he has been awash (anger at the bishop, at the members of Aretine society, at authority, at Guido, at the maid, at fate, at his actual self) if he is to channel his aggression into what would be, from Pompilia's viewpoint at least, a constructive course of action in which he would be her savior.

With Caponsacchi now "all eye, all ear" (6.724), Pompilia says (or he hears her say) precisely what he needs her to say if he is to reinstate his original vision of revealing his sanctity by rescuing her. Everything he hears her say interacts somehow with his psychological needs and vulnerabilities to define his path to glory and to heighten his desire to follow it. Her opening statement that she "'can neither read nor write'" but has been forced to hear letters purportedly from Caponsacchi (6.725-30) immediately clears her of any involvement in the letters that have so offended Caponsacchi, thus confirming his theory of her innocence and presenting her response to the faked letters from him as a mirror image of his response to the faked letters from her: both have been forced to endure exposure to a corruption each has wished to escape. Pompilia's disapproval of the idea "'That [Caponsacchi], a priest, can dare love [her], a wife'" precisely mirrors Caponsacchi's reply to the second letter he received: "'I am a priest: and you are wedded wife'" (6.731, 598).

Pompilia's mirroring casts her as an extension of Caponsacchi, offering him not only confirmation but also a sense of possessing the idealized audience he desires. Furthermore, she consistently manifests the same perfectionistic need for correctness--even (and perhaps especially) in this crisis--that we saw in Caponsacchi when he had to have his perfectionistic shoulds appeased by having his vows interpreted into a form he could live up to. When Pompilia broaches her request for help, for example, she insists that she must ask for only the exact amount of help that will be innocent (6.748-50); and she sets limits that control the priest's vindictiveness toward Guido by reasoning that she will respond to Guido's hatred only enough to escape from him (6.800-04). Her correctness reintroduces what Caponsacchi has lost during his rage to "get" Guido: the sense of principled (as opposed to self-indulgent) righteousness which helps to define his emulative idealized self.

The association of righteousness with the proposed rescue is reinforced by Pompilia's appeal to the priest's sense of chivalric and priestly duty (cf. Gridley, "Browning's Caponsacchi" 288): "'the strong should help the weak: / 'You know how weak the strongest women are'" (6.822-23); and priests should help those "'in danger of a sin-- / 'Despair of any help from providence'" (6.837-38). Altogether, the aspects of Pompilia's speech examined so far promote a merging of her personal existence with Caponsacchi's, through mirroring, and at the same time introduce a greater degree of perfectionistic ordering into the relationship. These elements also begin to create, within the context of their narcissistic union, a distinct masculine/priestly

obligation for Caponsacchi: an obligation to play the rescuer's role which, in his dream of glory, has been only a wish. To his woulds, Pompilia adds shoulds.

Pompilia's speech further heightens Caponsacchi's sense of role obligation by specifying the horror of her situation--a horror that must affect him in a particularly immediate way because she seems an extension of himself. She really is a captive "'in [the] power'" of Guido, his mistress-maid, and others in his household (6.728). After her marriage, Guido turned "'Into a fury of fire, if once he was / 'Merely a man: his face threw fire at mine'" (6.773-75). She too associates Guido with Satan and a fire-breathing dragon. Engaging in sex with him is equivalent to burning in hell:

> "He laid a hand on me that burned all peace,
> "All joy, all hope, and last all fear away,
> "Dipping the bough of life, so pleasant once,
> "In fire which shrivelled leaf and bud
> alike. . . ." (6.776-79)

Given Caponsacchi's own recent revulsion from sexuality, he finds again in Pompilia a magnifying mirror reinforcing his existing fantasy of her situation. Other horrors are still to be divulged, and they no doubt further confirm the mythology of Pompilia's plight that Caponsacchi has already created: Guido's "'people . . . tortured'" Pompilia's parents, who have deserted her; and Guido's younger brother, "'the young idle priest i' the house,'" has been pursuing her (6.794, 844-45). Most frightening of all, she repeatedly alludes to the possibility that Guido will murder her. Thus Pompilia's peril and Guido's infamy appear in reality to be just as he has fantasized they are. His not rescuing her would therefore be a death blow to his

emulative self-idealization, but the glory to be gained by carrying out the rescue would be even greater than he had dreamed. Pompilia's speech has thus significantly raised the psychological stakes riding on the decision Caponsacchi faces.

Pompilia's account feeds into Caponsacchi's psychological needs in yet another way by revealing the inappropriate responses of several people--some of them authority figures against whom he already longs to rebel, others of them people enough like him to make him uncomfortable--when she asked for help or came within their sphere of influence. If Caponsacchi responds to her need in a way he and Pompilia see as appropriate, he will rise triumphantly above the "'good great men, / 'The Archbishop and the Governor,'" who responded to her pleas first with amusement, then with irritation, and finally with anger (6.827-30). Caponsacchi's disillusioned disgust with religious and social authority is confirmed as he is offered the opportunity to do better than they have. Two priests who have failed Pompilia--the "'good . . . Augustinian'" (6.833) who promised to write to her parents but did not do so because he "'fear[s] the world'" (6.835), and her lecherous brother-in-law whose behavior resembles in kind (if not in degree) Caponsacchi's past dalliances--represent to Caponsacchi grotesque versions of his old self. Pompilia offers him the opportunity to separate his glorious idealized self from these reflections of his despised self. She has told Caponsacchi that "'only [he] in the wide world'" "'proffer[s] assistance now'" (6.755-58); her story makes him feel that if he gives the assistance, it will

be only he in the wide world who is brave and strong and good and free enough to do so.

The final and most powerful stimulus Caponsacchi receives from Pompilia's speech comes from her direct evaluation of him, the "self-conception" she offers him (Slinn 118). She admits that when she judged him by the letters she thought were his, he "'seemed wicked and not good'" (6.863); but now, having seen him face to face, Pompilia says she is sure "'that at no time, you with the eyes here, / 'Ever intended to do wrong by me, / 'Nor wrote such letters therefore'" (6.875-77). Without his having "'uttered word yet,'" she is sure he is "'true, [has] been true, will be true'" (6.873-75). Caponsacchi feels elected; it is his "miracle" that Pompilia "chose / To summon [him] and signify her choice" and that "'she, by the crystalline soul, knew me, / 'Never mistook the signs'" (6.919-21, 933-34). He has been miraculously chosen; Pompilia, seeing his aspirations as his character traits, has confirmed his idealized self in advance of his actualizing it. In her eyes, he has already overcome his weaknesses (actual self) and is already her rescuer. In the presence of her certainty, he is certain, too: he promises to arrange, "'by to-morrow at this time,'" to take her to Rome (6.882-86). His path to glory seems clear and well marked; he seems eager to follow it.

Though the Pope envisions Caponsacchi as having now acted "on the instant" (10.1141), the priest does not set about efficiently planning the rescue and "'find[ing] / 'The sure and speedy means of travel,'" "'a carriage, money and the rest'" (6.882-83, 885). Instead, he first walks the streets until dawn in what Yetman has aptly termed "a kind of

psychological abandonment" that seems "not unlike the aftermath of the experience of the religious mystic" (17-18). Then for two days he undergoes a painful inner conflict between his desire to rescue Pompilia and (of all things) an impulse to devote himself to a humble priestly life.

It is little wonder that faced with these puzzling developments in a man whose self-idealization has just been confirmed by his ideal audience and whose path to glory has opened up in a spectacular way, readers have often fallen back on moral or religious concepts to explain what is happening. Thus the strange night of wandering becomes "bewilderment" at an influx of "new ideas" that may be "temptations," and his conflict one between "legalistic" and existential "concepts of the religious life" (Boo 185-86). Or his conflict becomes one "between temptation and resolution" and between his "self-protective instinct" and the "risk" of doing "his duty" (Altick and Loucks 53, 343). Or the conflict becomes one between reason and passion, or "between convention and conscience" (Yetman 17-18, 13). Or his experiences are seen as a transformation of eros to agape (Phipps 248-49) or as a psychological "disintegration" that destroys the priest's old "sinner's identity" and leads to "moral awakening" and spiritual "renovation" (Hassett 6, 62-63). Such descriptions, though congruent with Caponsacchi's own rhetoric, do not explain (except in terms of divine intervention) why it is that just when reality seems to be converging with Caponsacchi's self-idealization and his dreams of glory, he becomes "powerless" (6.945) to seize his opportunity.

The primary reason, ironically enough, is that the priest's narcissistic position, which has made him dream of winning glorious confirmation from an idealized audience, also makes him respond to the confirmation he has just gotten from Pompilia in a manner that first overwhelms him emotionally and then activates the inner conflicts that continue to paralyze him. A psychological understanding of his initial response--feeling "powerless" as he lies "passive" to "the invasion" Pompilia has triggered (6.945, 947)--will point toward an understanding of his succeeding days of immobilization.

The uncommonness of Caponsacchi's passivity during his night-long visionary experience must first be adequately recognized. Previous psychological readings have tended to see his passivity here as typical of him (see Wilt 352-53; Slinn 117-18), thus responding to his tendency to conform in order to get approval but overlooking his expansive attitudes: his pride in social superiority, especially to Guido; his acknowledged ambition; his sense of entitlement; his rebellious feelings toward controlling authority; and the like. His conformity and his attraction to the easy way should not be seen as basically passive, since they are connected, respectively, with his narcissistic need for affirmation of his exhibited self and his narcissistic claim that things should be easy for him. Nor can his correspondence with Guido and his response to Guido's challenge be characterized as passive. Altogether, habitual passivity seems not to be an adequate psychological explanation of the priest's experience.

The precursor of this experience is rather to be found in a single episode: Caponsacchi's recapturing of the symbiotic state as a

result of his first sight of Pompilia. Having now seen her again and in addition having heard her speak words that reflect and confirm so precisely the thoughts in his own mind, Caponsacchi falls even more deeply into the narcissistic "in-love" state than he did before. During this merger experience, Caponsacchi "overvalues the object," Pompilia, "and feels a passive submissiveness in relationship to" her; he "incorporates" his idealized image of her "and feels elated by virtue of this association" (Rothstein 166). Undergoing this "hypomanic elation," he feels an "illusionary transformation" of himself (Rothstein 187): regarding the idealized Pompilia with "reverence" and "awe" (Rothstein 19), he draws from union with her "a sense of omnipotence and completeness" (Rothstein 187).

This description of the narcissistic in-love state is highly congruent with Caponsacchi's description of his visionary experience. The combination of passive submission and a sense of transformation is evident: "By the invasion I lay passive to, / In rushed new things, the old were rapt away . . ." (6.947-48); "Into another state, under new rule / I knew myself was passing swift and sure . . ." (6.964-65). His feeling of "invasion" (6.947) suggests the loss of personal boundaries experienced in merger with Pompilia and the spiritual universe she represents to him; at the same time, he feels this loss as a removal of the limits that ordinarily confine him: "the imprisonment / Of the outside air" and "the inside weight o' the world / That pulled [him] down" are "Alike abolished" (6.949-51).

This feeling of omnipotence grows as Caponsacchi--doubtless recalling his own aspirations to the martyr's triumph as well as

Pompilia's belief that he "'"would die for"'" her (6.861)--is swept up by the conviction that he can not only escape a human being's physical limits in life, but also outvault death itself: "Death meant, to spurn the ground, / Soar to the sky,--die well and you do that" (6.951-52). At this point, paradoxically enough, when his narcissistically expanded sense of himself has carried him beyond air and weight, beyond anywhere in the world, he is nowhere in the world at all: "The very immolation [makes] the bliss"; "the intense centre of the flame" is "a heaven" (6.953, 957-58). The triumph of self that he has conceived must abolish his worldly existence as a limited, separate being. "Death" has become for him "a veil / Hiding all gain [his] wisdom [strives] to grasp" (6.955-56).

Narcissistic expansion to take in all objects ultimately implies merger with all objects--a loss, or sacrifice, of self (a death by merger) that shades into needs and values associated with self-effacement. This sacrifice still retains for Caponsacchi the exhibitionistic quality of narcissism, however, as is clear when he compares "the initiatory pang" of his envisioned triumph with the "bitter-sweet" feeling (6.967)

> when the virgin-band, the victors chaste,
> Feel at the end the earthly garments drop,
> And rise with something of a rosy shame
> Into immortal nakedness: so I
> Lay, and let come the proper throe would thrill
> Into the ecstasy and outthrob pain. (6.968-73)

Caponsacchi seems to be thinking of the "pang" at the moment of death when "body and soul are wrenched asunder," as St. Augustine puts it (416), followed by the moment when the souls of the good, especially martyrs, are often represented in religious art as naked spiritual

bodies rising in rapture from their abandoned corporeal bodies ("earthly garments" [6.969]) while an audience of people, angels, or both look on in admiration at what is indeed a fine spectacle. Caponsacchi's anticipation of a Christ-like self-sacrificial death, mighty resurrection, and glorious ascension "Into the ecstasy" (6.973) of the beatific vision is "self-inflationary," as Buckler notes (146). It is not so much a "conversion" (Hassett 64) as it is a fantasy of having leaped from his current position of unfulfilled obligation to his reward in heaven--without having to undergo an intervening test to establish his desserts.

The "sexual overtones" of Caponsacchi's experience, much emphasized by Buckler (145-46; cf. Hassett 64), seem to me most important in explaining his reaction to the intense experience of abandoning personal boundaries. The orgasmic quality of his merger with the idealized Pompilia surely does register with him, at least unconsciously. Both because of his empathy with her revulsion toward sex and because of the importance of virginity in his vision of triumph, he cannot allow himself to feel anything resembling sexual arousal. He becomes ashamed and afraid of his strong emotions and, to a degree, afraid of the woman whose presence sweeps aside his control over them. His sudden attraction to "'the Bride'" (the church)--which, as he now remembers, "'took [his] plighted troth, . . . / 'To fold [his] warm heart on [her] heart of stone / 'And freeze'" himself there (6.977-80)--is I think a defensive reaction to the archaic narcissistic heat and fluidity that make his response to the "'fleshly woman'" (6.981) Pompilia so threatening. The cold stone of the church

represents a container where he can cool down and firm up. Pompilia does not represent an "evil temptation" (Boo 185) to engage in sex at some future time so much as a stimulus that makes Caponsacchi feel almost as guilty as he would if he had already done so.

The content and intensity of Caponsacchi's in-love vision contribute in other important ways to his reactive moves toward the church and toward asceticism. Like Guido with his vision of perfect wolfdom in the next world, Caponsacchi has had a very exciting, gratifying fantasy of a martyr's afterlife, but the harsh reality he faces "i' the gray of dawn" (6.974) is that he would have to be martyred--be <u>killed</u>--to make that dream come true. This unfortunate detail, combined with Pompilia's suggestion that Guido is capable of murder, is enough to arouse the priest's normal fear of death; his fear, in turn, undermines his narcissistic confidence, makes him feel weak and helpless, and thus lays him open to the emergence of his self-effacing trends. The fantasy of martyrdom, though staged narcissistically, also draws directly on self-effacing values that have always been present in Caponsacchi's emulative idealized image: humility, noble suffering, and self-sacrifice. In these ways, Caponsacchi's vision foregrounds his compliant traits at the very time when, in order to carry out the promised rescue, he needs to feel strong and powerful, needs to value humility less than self-assertion, suffering less than resistance to the torturer, and self-sacrifice less that self-preservation. He needs to carry out the myriad of minor aggressions involved in preparing for a long journey to be undertaken on very short notice. Instead he finds himself (6.974) standing

outside his church, which now "seem[s] to say for the first time" (6.976) that he owes to it exactly, and only, the self-effacement that Pompilia's rescuer cannot entertain.

The in-love vision in itself thus contributes to Caponsacchi's impulse to retreat to the church; but the combined effect of Pompilia's speech, his promise to her, and the vision carries even more weight. At the end of his vision the material world, that city of solid objects populated by souls walking about securely knit to their bodies, is re-gathering its daylight existence; and Caponsacchi faces a crisis much like the one that was posed by his priestly vows. He is committed to fulfilling another vow, and the stakes are far higher. His emulative idealized image has taken shape in relation to the fantasy of attaining sainthood by opposing some monstrous evil to rescue a preeminently worthy victim--sometime. Hearing Pompilia's speech and responding to it as he has just done have convinced him that the time must be now.

While his in-love vision continued, he could experience himself as having already become his idealized self, a feeling he would like to recapture; but he can only do so by acting out his fantasy, by fulfilling his promise. Failure would make him worse than nothing. Once again, he is entering a state of unconscious panic; and once again, his self-effacing trends have been aroused to undermine his confidence and predispose him to follow whatever plausible authority might offer him a way out with his self-idealization intact. This time, however, there is no bishop at hand to wave a magic wand of dispensation, excuse him from the test, and provide the alternative he

needs. Hence it comes that outside his church, absolutely desperate, Caponsacchi must find his own way out.

His escape hatch opens when the church itself "seem[s]" to speak to him in a voice so stern and absolute that only in his absolute desperation could he have unconsciously projected it:

> "But am not I the Bride, the mystic love
> "O' the Lamb, who took thy plighted troth,
> my priest,
> "To fold thy warm heart on my heart of stone
> "And freeze thee nor unfasten any more?
> "This is a fleshly woman,--let the free
> "Bestow their life-blood, thou art pulseless
> now!" (6.977-82)

This is indeed "a passionless and threatening bride" (Hassett 65), but her message is (of course) perfectly suited to Caponsacchi's need for an alternative to the trial-by-rescue he faces. The church tells him that the real test is already over, for he has taken his priestly vows; all he must do now is to retain his credit for having passed by giving up the idea of taking the test set by the "'fleshly woman'" (6.981). Carrying out this commitment to inaction is conceived as martyrdom; the sacrifice of action <u>is</u> his martyr's death, so that he has died already, too: "'thou art pulseless now!'" (6.982). Caponsacchi would naturally prefer this figurative death to a literal one, and if he can "'fold [his] warm heart'" (6.979) into this redefinition of trial and martyrdom, his panic will be allayed and his pride preserved.

What follows is his attempt to do exactly that, to assimilate his past experience and present situation into the new model of triumph--unconsciously externalized and now consciously received as the church's message--which his fear and pride have created for him. This model reflects the influence of what Boo has called the "legalistic ideal" of

the priesthood drawn from "his years of training . . . heavy with precept and dominated . . . by a rigid sense of duty that allows no exceptions to the law" (185). This internalized legalism is manifested in Caponsacchi's earlier need to have his vows authoritatively reinterpreted so that he can fulfill them and in his attraction to Pompilia's quasi-Scholastic moral reasoning. Other assumptions of the model seem to me characteristic of Catholic Christian devotionalism, by which I mean a ritualized (therefore perfectionistic) self-effacement quite compatible with legalism by virtue of its ritual elements, which often focus upon mortification of the flesh and renunciation. Examples of devotionalism in this sense would include practices such as fasting on certain days; saying set prayers, particularly large numbers of them, in prescribed ways; or for members of certain religious orders, practicing ritual self-flagellation, sleeping in one's coffin, going barefoot, and the like.

Caponsacchi begins to assimilate his new legalistic, devotional ideal by defining the martyr's death not as it appeared in his recent vision, but as it is expressed in the "passion" of "the man / Whose form of worship is self-sacrifice" (6.996-99). The figure embodying this passionate death is a "monk . . . / Prostrate and corpse-like at the altar-foot / Intent on his <u>corona</u>" (glossed by Cook 125 as "beads"), a hero of the devotionalism that Caponsacchi formerly saw as a matter of "'gabbl[ing] Latin and protrud[ing] that nose / 'Smoothed to a sheep's through no brains and much faith!'" (6.986-88, 993-94). Stretched against the stone floor, the monk has found the devotional way to follow the church's admonition to unite his heart of flesh to

her "'heart of stone'" forever (6.979-80). The monk's life is a martyr's death, a way to stay alive but to sacrifice oneself. To achieve this martyrdom Caponsacchi need not act, but only restrain himself from acting.

Caponsacchi next tries to adjust and cement himself to the devotional ideal by seeing it as a new, internalized version of his old self-myth of striving and winning. When he hears the church's order to "'come be dead with me'" (6.1001), it is

> As if, i' the fabled garden, I had gone
> On great adventure, plucked in ignorance
> Hedge-fruit, and feasted to satiety,
> Laughing at such high fame for hips and haws,
> And scorned the achievement; then come all at once
> O' the prize o' the place, the thing of perfect gold,
> The apple's self: and, scarce my eye on that,
> Was 'ware as well o' the seven-fold dragon's watch.
> (6.1002-09)

He decides to obey this order. Within this context of the order and the obedient response to it, Caponsacchi's simile appears to mean that in the past, he has gathered the lesser benefits that his connection with the church offered; but he "scorned the achievement" of these worthless things. Now, however, he sees the real "prize" the church offers: the martyr's death-in-life of "worship" through "self-sacrifice" (6.999). The adversary he must defeat to win the prize is best read in this context, I think, as the "great red dragon, having seven heads": "that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world. . ." (Revelation 12: 3, 9). He must hold off the lurking temptations of the devil by obeying the church, achieving a devotional version of his triumph.

This reading of Caponsacchi's simile is consistent with the surface context; but another possible reading, at least equally persuasive, suggests that his efforts to adopt a new model of sacrifice and triumph are already being subverted by his old model of rescue and triumph. Buckler suggests that he deliberately makes his golden apple myth "easy to reconfigurate" when he wishes to (147); I suspect, however, that the little allegory reconfigurates itself because his unconscious valorization of Pompilia remains so great that his central symbol, the golden apple, must always at some level be Pompilia (cf. Hair 149), who is "the prize" in the original model of his search for glory. Thus the simile may be read as Cook reads it, as referring to "the garden of the Hesperides" where the golden apple-prize Pompilia is guarded by the "dragon Ladon"--"the Church, which warns Caponsacchi off . . . Pompilia" (125). Here the church has become the priest's opponent, blocking the path to his desire; thus the church which Caponsacchi is consciously trying to embrace as his bride--and which he will (for a time) obey--is at the same time, in terms of his old model, his enemy the dragon, which must be defeated. The point of the dual readings is that both of them make sense even though they express contradictory feelings about the figures in the allegory. Through them we can image the underlying, unconscious ambivalence subverting Caponsacchi's efforts to re-form his dream of glory in a way that will allow him to escape the equally unconscious sense of psychological peril aroused by the prospect of testing himself by rescuing Pompilia.

Given this complicated stalemate, Caponsacchi's next "decision" must not entail that he make a move. Thus he decides to regard the church's command as "The first authoritative word," the command that "was God's" (6.1001, 1013), and decides to "'sit down, silently obey'" (6.1021). His continuing conflict is manifested in his need to reconcile his obedience to the church with loyalty to Pompilia by saying that "Obedience," which was until recently "strange" to him, has "been struck into [him] / By the look o' the lady," who has "lifted [him] to the level of her" so that he can now hear God's command (6.1010-15).

Now it is evident, thanks to his having received a special revelation, that giving up the rescue actually "'is the true [self-sacrifice], seals up the perfect sum'" (6.1020). Caponsacchi can now feel called to interpret his priestly vows very strictly, thus avoiding the dreaded test of his expansive self-idealization, much as his bishop once allowed him to feel called to interpret his priestly vows very liberally, thus avoiding a similarly dreaded test. In both situations, of course, the responsibility for the decision shifts to his superiors, so that in his present situation he is doing what Pompilia asked (obeying) even when he is not doing what Pompilia asked (rescuing her). Thus he maintains an uneasy suspension between his conflicting impulses from "dawn" till "sunset": "I sat stone-still, let time run over me" (6.1022-23, 1027).

The attempted reconciliation of obedience to God and loyalty to Pompilia cannot remain stable without reinforcement. If Pompilia is the source of his new receptiveness to God's word, she must not be

morally ambiguous, as she was in his golden apple myth, but unequivocally good. His vow to rescue her thus regains its moral status alongside his priestly vow, and at "vespers" he feels acutely that "'She counts the minutes till I keep my word / 'And come say all is ready'" (6.1027-29). Seeing clearly that he is obligated to follow contradictory courses, Caponsacchi scrambles for an argument to reduce his two obligations to one, yet imply that both will somehow be met:

> "I am a priest.
> "Duty to God is duty to her: I think
> "God, who created her, will save her too
> "Some new way, by one miracle the more,
> "Without me. Then, prayer may prevail perhaps."
> (6.1029-33)

To say that this argument is "casuistical" (Armstrong, "Note" 277) or "presumptuously" made (Boo 186) is quite correct; it becomes psychologically interesting, however, when it is recognized as Caponsacchi's attempt to strike a perfectionistic bargain with God.

According to Horney, the psychic logic underlying this kind of bargain is based on the person's assumption that "Because he is fair, just, dutiful, he is entitled to fair treatment by others and by life in general" (NHG 197), and thus a fortiori by God, if one assumes, consistent with orthodox Christian belief, that He is the very essence and source of justice. There have already been signs that the legalistic components of Caponsacchi's new model of triumph have been attaching themselves to some such deal: he has thought of himself as "'pay[ing]'" his "'self-sacrifice'" for "'seal[ing] up the perfect sum'" (6.1019-21)--to buy what? He has not said; but now it begins to emerge that he has in mind a contract with God to repay the priest's continued obedience by doing something for him: saving Pompilia. God

cannot renege, for He cannot do that which is against His nature, which is just. The justice of His saving Pompilia is even more evident, to Caponsacchi, given that God "'created her'" (6.1031): surely that makes it incumbent upon Him to look after her. Shaky and murky though all this reasoning is--not surprisingly, since a bargain with fate, in Horney's theory, is the product of neurotic defenses mounted largely by the unconscious mind, not the product of a disinterested intelligence superbly trained in Scholastic theology--it indicates that for Pompilia's deliverance, Caponsacchi is ready to pay with the extra merit he believes he gains by strictly observing his vow to God.

The major weaknesses in Caponsacchi's position at this juncture are that his reliance on God to rescue Pompilia does not offer the concrete certainty of its getting done that his doing it would offer and, perhaps more important, that his bargain with God, being private, cannot win Pompilia's approval. She might attribute to him a less noble reason for not returning: he fears she will think he is afraid (cf. Armstrong, "Note" 277; McGhee 87). His efforts to convince himself that "'She knows it is no fear withholds me'" (6.1040) are undermined because it <u>is</u> unconscious fear, primarily of having his self-idealization tested, that has withheld him. He specifically fears that as she waits, Pompilia might entertain "'the fantastic notion that [he] fear[s] / 'The world now, fear[s] the Archbishop, fear[s] perhaps / 'Count Guido'" (6.1043-45). As Caponsacchi attempts to reassure himself that she cannot possibly believe he has these fears, his vehement ridicule of the very idea of his having them suggests that he is working to keep exactly such fears suppressed. He may scorn Guido;

but why, then, does he mention Guido's skill as a liar and associate him with a "'sword'" (6.1045-47)? He may be indifferent to the opinion of "'The world'" (6.1044); but he, not Pompilia, thinks it a "'wise'" thing to avoid the "'scandal'" that the rescue project would bring to a "'noble name'" (6.1051-54). The more he fears Pompilia's thinking him afraid, the more he must deny fearing; but the more he denies having fears, the more he risks hearing himself expressing these very fears.

The mounting tensions of this situation are likely to drive him to prove to himself, as well as Pompilia, that he is not afraid. What Caponsacchi needs, then, is a way to reconcile several conflicting needs: his need to preserve his view of himself as a potential fearless rescuer but to avoid a real test of this potential; his need to maintain his current devotional path to glory via an obedient, self-sacrificing priestliness; his need to hold open his entitlement within the church by doing nothing to cause the scandal he fears; and his need to continue in a relationship with Pompilia.

"At evening," the priest hits upon a course of action that just happens to contain at least some mollification for each of these needs. Feeling he has "'achiev[ed] victory" (6.1055) by becoming the ideal, self-abnegating priestly martyr of his new model of glory, he must now conscientiously carry out "'the priest's peculiar part'"--his proper role--by "'counsel[ing], comfort[ing],'" "'minister[ing], advis[ing]'" Pompilia to pray, and exhorting her against "'despair'" (6.1056-57, 1059-60). His victory implies not only that he <u>can</u> now return to Pompilia (since he is no longer tempted to elope with her), but also that he <u>should</u> return to fulfill his real mission as a priest.

Returning will allow him to avoid losing Pompilia and will also allow him to share with her the bargain with God that he has so much wished she could know about (6.1036-39). Helping Pompilia to overcome "'despair'" (6.1060) of God's grace will save her soul, a kind of rescue justifiable as part of his proper role and thus not ultimately risky to his relationship with his patrons. Going to Pompilia will also prove, at least in his mind, that he is not afraid of Guido, who after all might be lurking about.

Whether in addition Caponsacchi can retrieve his emulative self-idealization and rescue project will depend largely on whether Pompilia can effectively confirm that he is after all on the path to the rescuer's triumph and on whether, in her presence, the leaden weight of his fears is transformed to feathers and fluff. He knows, at some level, that Pompilia can have these effects on him, and so in a sense his justification for returning is, as Boo says, an "excuse" (186) for seeking them. His need to resolve his painful inner conflicts drives him back to Pompilia in hopes that she will supply a decisive force toward one side or the other.

Pompilia does not let him down: whether her efficacy is connected with her "physical presence" (Yetman 17), "her personality" (Armstrong, "Note" 278), "her . . . love" (Shaw 280), or (as I think) a particular way of relating to Caponsacchi that includes all of these, she soon "completes Caponsacchi as a man of action" (Johnson 130). Judging from the priest's account, what begins to accomplish this immediately is Pompilia's "lean[ing] . . . / Over the terrace, look[ing] at" him from the first moment (6.1063-64) and gazing into his

face as she speaks (6.1069). She thus creates ideal conditions for Caponsacchi to exhibit--exclusively for her and for her exclusive approval--either his emulative idealized self or his new role of the martyr-priest who is saving her in subtle ways she does not yet know. The latter option is quickly eliminated for him by her insistent questions: "'Why is it you have suffered me to stay / 'Breaking my heart two days more than was need? / 'Why delay help . . . ?'" "'Why is nothing done? You know my need'" (6.1065-67, 1071).

She unwittingly rejects Caponsacchi's recent revisions of her need (she needs prayers, needs her good name, needs counseling, needs to have her soul saved) and reasserts her need as <u>she</u> defines it. Her allusion to having suffered because of his delay threatens him with terrible self-hate. Her statement that he has only "'one day more'" (6.1073) means that if he is ever to have her approval, ever to live without self-hate, ever to reveal himself as his emulative idealized self, he must win it now, avoid it now, reveal it now. These all-or-nothing implications of her questions weaken the attraction of less regressive narcissistic satisfactions such as general social approval and the benefits of entitlement, particularly since those values exist outside the charmed circle of his narcissistic exchange with Pompilia. When he is drawn into that powerful archaic territory, she is not only the only audience that matters, but the only one that there really is.

It nonetheless seems surprising that the pressure now on Caponsacchi does not again prove too much for him. What makes the difference this time is that in addition to arousing his fear of her disapproval and presenting an absolute deadline for his action,

Pompilia simultaneously gives him two extraordinarily positive messages. First, she insists that God has ordained this last opportunity for rescue (6.1072-73), a statement that chimes with Caponsacchi's recent bargaining: it is as though God has responded to the priest's spell of self-sacrifice by granting him the chance to return to his emulative rescue project. Second and more importantly, Pompilia diminishes the hold of Caponsacchi's fears and inner conflicts upon him by seeing him as his idealized self: "'You are again here, in the self-same mind, / 'I see here, steadfast in the face of you,-- / 'You grudge to do no one thing that I ask'" (6.1068-70). He is not thus "shamed into action" (Armstrong, "Notes" 277; cf. Slinn 119), but is empowered to act because she helps him to demolish his awareness of his actual weaknesses.

Thus Pompilia's last question--"'shall I be saved or no?'" (6.1073)--comes to Caponsacchi not as a test he must pass to reveal himself as his idealized hero self, but rather as a feat he can perform because he is that self already. With Pompilia's gaze fastened on him as she awaits his answer, Caponsacchi can exhibit himself as the hero, "<u>the will</u> and <u>the way</u>" (Buckler 148): "'Care for what I care-- / 'Only! Now follow me as I were fate!'" (6.1075-76).

His archaic grandiosity liberated, Caponsacchi feels omnipotent and all-encompassing; he is experiencing himself now as though he were becoming one with the God to Whom, as lately as the day before, he prayed for Pompilia's miraculous rescue. He feels he can sweep aside her possible reservations about his past behavior (6.1074-75)--which are of course his own as well--because in the mirror she holds up to

him, he has seen himself as a being about whom they need have no reservations. Because he is now godlike, he conceives of her as an extension of him who will naturally "'care for what [he] care[s]-- / 'Only!'" (6.1075-76). Fully identified with his grandiose, heroic idealized self, Caponsacchi feels he is Pompilia's fate, not its "instrument" (Yetman 19), but its very essence.

This unqualified identification with his emulative self-idealization fuels what Buckler has aptly called the priest's "active phase" (148). In a flash, with an air of absolute authority, he gives Pompilia a set of orders for her escape from Guido's palace to an inn at the edge of the city (6.1077-84)--orders that do seem to be, as the Pope puts it, an "impulsive . . . self-display" (10.1147), since he leaves it up to Pompilia to get out of the house alone, in "'the solid black'" part of the night (6.1079), and to meet him at the end of a complicated route which he checks only after he has left her to see if it is "practicable" (6.1090). Making reservations at the inn for a carriage and driver, Caponsacchi has his pride fed by "the host," who obsequiously confirms the priest's social superiority and its efficaciousness: "'With Caponsacchi it is ask and have; / 'I know my betters'" (6.1092-94). With everything coming to him so easily, Caponsacchi now has the further confirmation of getting his claims honored. It is no wonder that he is energized, apparently functioning effortlessly as "the nobleman in command" (Boo 187).

Nourished by his "unquestioned belief in his greatness and uniqueness" (NHG 194), on the morning before the escape Caponsacchi exhibits both the vulnerability and the rapture of one functioning in

identification with his liberated grandiosity. His momentary paranoia at his servant's innocent reminder of some small obligations at church--"'Sir, this eve-- / 'Do you forget?'" (6.1107-08)--shows that when he is immersed in a state of regressive omnipotence, he really feels people around him to be extensions of him, so that what is in his mind is accessible to them. This time the confusion and anxiety are easily remedied because the priest can control his servant, but the brief episode of unwarranted fear is important for understanding the intensity of Caponsacchi's later dread of Guido and his vulnerability to Guido's malevolent presence.

Caponsacchi also revels in omnipotence as he issues orders for "'a laic dress,'" "'a sword in case of accident,'" and lies his servant will tell to account for his absence (6.1120-22). Shaping present and future as he wills, the priest is confirmed as his idealized self, feeling more and more that he has transcended all limits:

> And thus
> Through each familiar hindrance of the day
> Did I make steadily for its hour and end,--
> Felt time's old barrier-growth of right and fit
> Give way through all its twines, and let me go.
> Use and wont recognized the excepted man,
> Let speed the special service,--and I sped. . . .
> (6.1124-30)

The boundaries of morality and custom seem to Caponsacchi to fall before him without his even having to fight against them; the world seems to know and to accede to his needs without his even having to articulate them. The "twines" that "let [him] go" (6.1128) represent also the shoulds that previously pulled him toward conformity and conventionality as means of gaining approval; freed of them

(temporarily, at least) by his more compelling relationship to Pompilia, he has no doubt that he is "the excepted man" (6.1129) whose "needs [and] . . . tasks are so important that they entitle him to every privilege" (NHG 195).

In this frame of mind, "at the dead between midnight and morn," Caponsacchi awaits Pompilia's arrival "before the gate" near the inn (6.1131-32). Since she eventually arrives in silence, dressed in "Black from head down to foot" (6.1144), his description of his vigil reflects not that unspectacular external event, but the significance of the occasion in his fantasy of himself and her as figures of mythic stature. Within that idealized framework, he waits "With a tune in [his] ears" and "A light in [his] eyes" that are indeed in him, heralding the approach of an imagined audience of angelic presences who are "crowding" around "To watch the way o' the warfare" between the priest and the forces of evil (6.1133-37). Among Caponsacchi's exhibitionistic fantasies of triumphant performance, this one most blatantly expresses his sense of the cosmic power and significance of his expanded, omnipotent grandiose self. It is as if his will makes Pompilia arrive on cue; at "the ecstatic minute" when he "must" have her appear, he sees the "whiteness" that he attributes to her (6.1138-39), that indeed he requires her to have for his grand performance. When she "Glide[s] into the carriage," he feels it is "a cloud [that] / Gathers the moon up" (6.1145-46) to travel with him.

At last he speaks the lines he conceives as appropriate to his heavenly audience, his lunar companion, his own heroic idealized self, and (presumably) the carriage driver: "'To Rome, as if the road burned

underneath! / 'Reach Rome, then hold my head in pledge, I pay / 'The run and the risk to heart's content!'" (6.1147-49). It is difficult to scrutinize this speech, which so evidently seems to Caponsacchi to command the great moment at which the rescue finally begins, without some amusement, for it is in fact an elaborate promise to pay the driver well once he gets them to Rome. At no point is it clearer to the reader that the mode of Caponsacchi's heroism is to provide the cash to buy others' services; yet at no point does it seem less clear to the priest that his mystical visions and dreams of glory, his Christian knighthood and mythic rescuer's role, come to this: he makes the reservations and brings the money. A bargainer at heart, though not consciously so, he summons heaven to witness what seems to him, in his narcissistic self-rapturedness, a transcendent commitment, but what is in reality an oral contract.

IV

The verbal glitter of Caponsacchi's version of heroic rescue obscures its realistic dimensions. For much the same reason, I suspect, many readers of the flight episode itself have joined in Caponsacchi's idealization of it, seeing it as a "great spiritual experience" (Shaw 282), a "spiritual journey" to "salvation" (King, Focusing Artifice 151), or a "conversion" experience that "free[s]" Caponsacchi's "true identity" (Hassett 41-42). Caponsacchi himself, who places his conversion earlier, seems closer to the mark when he characterizes his experience during the escape, in the presence of Pompilia's "perfect soul," as one of "safety" and of "faith" in a higher power mediated by her (6.1162, 1191, 1193). This analysis is

compatible with a description of his state as a prolonged and often heightened version of the narcissistic transference, with Pompilia as his self-object, that he has experienced before in her presence.

During the journey Caponsacchi is really "alone" (6.1151) for the first (and only) significant span of time with the sole idealized audience to whom he can exhibit and gain consistent confirmation of his emulative idealized self. Feeling safe in the sole regard of Pompilia's gaze, he is a blissfully expanded, limit-transcending self that approaches--and thus believes in--Godhead. At the same time, his intense engagement with Pompilia results in his progressively greater idealization of her, increasing both the value of her confirmation of him and the degree of "'reverential ecstasy'" (Rothstein 219) with which he regards her. In this transference, the immensity of his narcissistic satisfaction is also immensely hazardous, as it turns out; for the regressive, maladaptive mode of his experience--though mitigated in part by Pompilia's actual, separate physical presence, words and actions, and needs--weakens Caponsacchi's ability to perceive accurately and to respond realistically to the "low world" (6.1195) through which the carriage--moon-bearing vessel for a snatched-down chunk of celestial space--hurtles toward a most unheavenly confrontation with that world. The encounter with Guido at Castelnuovo demonstrates how very difficult it is for Caponsacchi to leave the narcissistic paradise of the flight experience in order to act effectively; the adultery trial, how excruciatingly frustrating it is for him to attempt to communicate and defend that paradisal experience;

his exile, how nearly impossible it is for him either to regain it or to live without it.

As Caponsacchi prepares to call up his memories of the flight, he tells the judges that he wants and needs to give them a complete, connected account to "Mirror . . . plain" for them "the perfect soul Pompilia" (6.1161-62). Yet when he is ready to start, hoping to use "Each incident" in creating that "one pure . . . / Mirror" (6.1166, 1160-61), he finds he cannot do it:

> After all, I shall give no glare--at best
> Only display you certain scattered lights
> Lamping the rush and roll of the abyss:
> Nothing but here and there a fire-point pricks
> Wavelet from wavelet. . . . (6.1171-75)

Caponsacchi's images suggest that in his mind (represented, in typically Romantic fashion, as a lamp), the flight experience remains as a troubled sea, its surface discernible only in "scattered" fragments, its "rush[ing] and roll[ing]" depths threatening to swallow up what few "lights" he has--to pull him under, down into "the abyss" (6.1172-73). The images seem to be at odds with the priest's insistence on the transcendently clear spiritual quality of his experience with Pompilia.

Of course, it may be that his memories of the flight are confused now because Pompilia is dying, or as Chell suggests, he may simply be having difficulty translating that experience of time as duration into the language of "external time" (111); but Caponsacchi attributes fragmentation and a going-under quality to the experience itself. His sea is a chaos not yet formed, the primal sea that was before time began. As figure for a primal mode of experience before the self can

either separate itself from its total experience or put its experience together into a coherent whole, it is the key to understanding the fragmented, incoherent, and at times almost hallucinatory quality of Caponsacchi's memories of the flight.

From "the first hour" (6.1176) of "a journey whose prime conditions seem to have been silence, passivity, trance" (Wilt 354), the regressive mode of Caponsacchi's experience is evident. At first, he can "Sometimes" neither "see nor understand" because "Blackness engulph[s]" him--a "partial stupor" from which he periodically "break[s] away, breathe[s] through the surprise, / And [is] aware again, and see[s]" Pompilia "In the dark vest with the white face and hands" (6.1178-82). The alternating states of submergence in and emergence from the primal sea (cf. J. Hillis Miller 82-84), both obviously regressive forms of experience, seem respectively to recapture something of the blissful, wishless state of embeddedness in the womb, completely merged with the nurturing environment, and something of the preindividuated state of the infant, whose small shocks of separation allow him or her to begin to "see [and] understand" (6.1178), in an almost hallucinatory way, that an other is also there--"the white face and hands" coming out of her black garments as fragments, tenuously connected pieces of her emerging from the surrounding darkness.

Caponsacchi's figurative way of interpreting his state both confirms its regressiveness and glorifies it into consistency with his highest aspirations:

> I said to myself--"I have caught it, I conceive
> "The mind o' the mystery: 'tis the way they wake

"And wait, two martyrs somewhere in a tomb
"Each by each as their blessing was to die;
"Some signal they are promised and expect,--
"When to arise before the trumpet scares:
"So, through the whole course of the world they
wait
"The last day, but so fearless and so safe!
"No otherwise, in safety and not fear,
"I lie, because she lies too by my side."
(6.1183-92)

On the surface, this fantasy of being Pompilia's "co-martyr" (Armstrong, "Note" 275) does suggest a "romantic dream" (Buckler 149) along the lines of a Romeo and Juliet story in which the lovers' death, occurring before they lie together (die) in the sexual sense, allows them to die and lie together without sin. This scenario, Charles Thomas Phipps observes, resolves Caponsacchi's conflict between the flesh and the spirit through "an idealized sacrificial fidelity" (270). More precisely, by defining his intense feelings as those of a dead person, he defends the elevated purity of his idealized role against any element of sexual interest, which, in his eyes, would degrade it.

The fantasy seems to me, nonetheless, not to be primarily important as a defensive transformation of true object love; "this is not love, Sirs," Caponsacchi tells the judges (6.1193), and I think he is essentially correct. Rather it is primarily a fantasy of regression toward the "'safety'" (6.1191) of psychological embeddedness, with Pompilia in his company. The "'two martyrs'" are not really dead in their "'tomb'" (6.1185), as Romeo and Juliet are; more like fetal twins than lovers, they are enclosed by their carriage-womb, where they "'wake'" and "'wait / 'The last day'" (6.1184,1189-90)--the day of their (re)birth--without pain, without needs or strivings, without disturbance "'through the whole course of the world'" (6.1189) until--

without trauma, "'before the trumpet scares'" (6.1188)--they "arise" not to "this low world" (6.1195), but to the new, perfected one where "God . . . reigns and rules" (6.1194) and where saints like these two will continue to be embedded in God's care as conceived in the Christian tradition: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21: 4).

In the dead martyr's role Caponsacchi finds a defense against fear (cf. Buckler 149)--fear of Guido, but even more, fear of what will happen if he fails to be the idealized heroic rescuer. If he does fail, he will not <u>really</u> fail. The dead martyrs failed to survive whatever persecution sent them out of the "low world" (6.1195); yet they have gotten death over with and are still together, neither having lost the other's approval, and better off than they would be in the changing, ordinary world, for they are content and invulnerable. Best of all, they are assured of being special cases in God's eyes, so special that they will be resurrected early to triumph at Judgment Day (while the ordinary dead are still just waking up) and to go on to spectacular eternal glory in heaven. The church's earlier invitation to martyrdom--"'come be dead with me!'" (6.1001)--is thus transferred to and integrated with Caponsacchi's rescue project, so that in either success or failure of the rescue, he will be with Pompilia, and (whether sooner or later) he will be his idealized self for all to see. Thus Caponsacchi finds in his regressive experience an affirmation of

his and Pompilia's special status and of his superior insight into "'the mystery'" (6.1184) of his election to glory.

Qualities of regressive experience persist throughout Caponsacchi's account of the journey, despite his efforts to "Mirror" his "perfect" self-object (6.1161-62) in detailed snapshots of specific episodes. His lingering absorption in an archaic mental state manifests itself in his losing track of places, forgetting names, slipping into disjunctures of things and the words for them. His previous brief encounters with Pompilia have produced similar lapses: after their first conversation he walked all night, losing track of where he was until dawn, and he "know[s] not how the night passed" (6.1106) after their second meeting. Now, on the journey, he can tell Pompilia some of the towns they "'have passed,'" but is not sure whether they bypassed or went "'through'" a major one (6.1203-05). He is not sure where he "left the carriage" to get food, for he "forget[s] the names!" (6.1208): "This was--I know not where--there's a great hill / Close over, and the stream has lost its bridge, / One fords it" (6.1214-16).

The childlike description in which a stream loses its bridge in some nameless place by a big hill links Caponsacchi to an aspect of Pompilia that twins with the archaic elements in his experience. She too tends to see things without being able to name them: "'What is it that made you smile, / 'At the great gate with the eagles and the snakes, / 'Where the company entered, 'tis a long time since?'" (6.1249-51); "'How do you call that tree with the thick top / 'That holds in all its leafy green and gold / 'The sun now like an immense

egg of fire?'" (6.1336-38). Her pre-literate state also associates her "'with the play-time'" (6.1268). Even so, Caponsacchi's continuing lapses of engagement with adult language cannot be attributed to Pompilia, for when she asks for his adult-to-adult opinion on the important question of whether she is in a state of sin for having left Guido, the priest thinks only of the fact that she has called him "'my friend'" and, he says, "I forget" what answer Pompilia got (6.1379-83).

An even more conspicuously regressive aspect of Caponsacchi's relationship to Pompilia on the journey is his mode of responding to her attention. He is acutely conscious of her gaze and reacts to it with expansive exhibitionism or with anxious mirroring of her mood, both reactions typical of small children to the caregiver's attention. He "answer[s]" her eyes or her look with premature assertions that he has "'saved'" her (6.1200-02, 1306-07) or, when her eyes are fearful, becomes "alarmed, [his] head . . . turning too" (6.1386-87, 1390). Narcissistic mirroring also occurs when Pompilia suffers a spell of sleeping and waking nightmares in which Guido is the devil: Caponsacchi, completely entering into her disturbance, exorcises the Guido-devil she believes is there (6.1292-1303). When these magic words apparently work, his sense of omnipotence reinforces his self-idealization even as it further diminishes his capacity to sort out his feelings and impulses from Pompilia's and to estimate realistically the limits of his powers.

Caponsacchi's greatest happiness comes when Pompilia mirrors his attraction to a profoundly embedded state, represented by the journey, and wishes to share it with him forever:

". . . if it might but last!
"Always, my life-long, thus to journey still!
"It is the interruption that I dread,--
"With no dread, ever to be here and thus!
"Never to see a face nor hear a voice!
"Yours is no voice; you speak when you are dumb;
"Nor face, I see it in the dark. I want
"No face nor voice that change and grow unkind."
That I liked, that was the best thing she said.
(6.1311-19)

Changelessness and fearlessness; communication without words; perception without stimulation; the companionship of an undifferentiated other (cf. Wilt 354): these are the conditions of a narcissistic near-merger, very similar to the state of Caponsacchi's twin martyrs. Wilt, who has noted this correspondence, remarks that Caponsacchi is "satisfied" "when [Pompilia] welcome[s] him to her mystic darkness" (254); yes, for it is his darkness as well, the safe one in which his beloved self-object is all his; he, all hers; and thus always.

The power of archaic narcissism in Caponsacchi's flight experience is supplemented by the way he finds in the specific details of each episode material for further idealization of Pompilia as object-of-rescue and of himself as the idealized heroic rescuer-self of his emulative search for glory, which requires that Pompilia be the endangered saint and he her strong protector, her savior, and as always, "the excepted man" (6.1129). We can observe Caponsacchi highlighting aspects of the flight that place him and Pompilia in contrast with one another, rather than in a mirroring relationship, whenever these differentiating elements, idealized by his neurotic imagination, heighten their respective modes of saintliness.

The first stop on the journey--near the bridgeless stream--provides such an opportunity for idealization. Caponsacchi brings "bread and wine" to Pompilia, responding reassuringly to her anxiety about the delay: "'They stay perforce, change horses,--therefore eat!'" (6.1212). Pompilia compares herself to an incurably sick person whose "'pain suddenly departs,'" wondering whether the fact that "'all the pain'" in her "'soul . . . is past at once'" means that her case is hopeless or means that "'some good'" has come out of her past pain (6.1216-27; cf. Cook 129). In this episode, Caponsacchi highlights his role as the priest bringing the sacrament (the bread and wine) to a desperately sick person and offering it to her in words reminiscent of the "Take, eat" of the communion ritual. Following his ministrations, the recipient's terrible pain and fear immediately disappear as if by a miracle. Caponsacchi's self-idealization is enhanced at the same time that the exceptionally devout near-martyr Pompilia, whose faith that good always comes out of pain has been miraculously rewarded, is further idealized as the worthy object of rescue.

A more complex instance of differentiating idealization, this time interacting with and reacting against regressive narcissistic impulses, appears in the conversation that opens when Pompilia tries to fathom Caponsacchi's reason for helping her:

> "Have you a mother?" "She died, I was born."
> "A sister then?" "No sister." "Who was it--
> "What woman were you used to serve this way,
> "Be kind to, till I called you and you came?"
> I did not like that word. (6.1228-34)

Why does he "not like that word"? As I suggested earlier, Pompilia's implied assumption that she is to him like his mother or sister may

bring this motherless man too close to conscious realization of the archaic dimension of his attraction to Pompilia, while at the same time stirring up his archaic needs. These seem to find a fantasy outlet a little later when, at a rest stop, Caponsacchi tells a woman, a mother with a small child and a baby, that Pompilia is his sister (6.1323).

The opening part of the conversation also threatens the priest's idealization of himself, Pompilia, and the flight. Pompilia "implie[s] that she [is] no more to him [than] any other woman whom he might help" (Cook 129), and her questions do not glorify either them or the flight: she appears as one among some group of women in Caponsacchi's life, doubtless reminding him of his past involvements with women less worthy than she is (Armstrong, "Note" 275); he appears as a "'kind'" (6.1233) son or brother, playing an ordinary social role (though in an unusual way); and by implication the flight appears at this point as simply a rapid emergency journey to Rome rather than the journey to glorious immortality that Caponsacchi wishes it to be.

Thus Caponsacchi is ready to make the most of Pompilia's remarks that contrast her and Caponsacchi in a way more nourishing to his self-idealization. Painting a picture of women's "'undue susceptibility'" to disapproval as making them apt to disintegrate into "'feathery nothing at a touch'" (6.1240-47), she asks if "'what may be man's strength overmuch'" (6.1239) makes men vulnerable in some other way. Her description of women in terms of "'weakness'" and men in terms of "'strength'" (6.1248) lends support to Caponsacchi's dream of glory by translating so easily into (what it is) a description of <u>her</u>

vulnerability and hence of her need for him and the rescue he, the strong one, is carrying out.

Her idea that men's strength may make them vulnerable--"'rocks split,'" after all (6.1246)--offers Caponsacchi a ready-made idealization of any vulnerability he feels and a defense against fear that Pompilia will interpret any vulnerability he shows as a sign of weakness. Her assumption that only women are overly sensitive to others' opinions suggests that she really does not think his delay in rescuing her had anything to do with his fearing adverse publicity--an assumption that he is eager to confirm at the first opportunity to exhibit his superior male independence of others' opinions, knowing that she will admire, approve of, and believe in his exhibition.

Thus it is no wonder that the next interchange Caponsacchi remembers involves his exhibition of expansive superiority and independence. When she asks why he has "'smile[d], / 'At the great gate . . . / 'Where the company entered'" (6.1249-51), his response shows that she has supplemented his narcissistic self-idealization. Stooping to teach his uncomprehending student, he explains that the "'villa-gate'" belongs to the very bishop whom "'People of old were wont to bid me please / 'If I would catch preferment . . .'" (6.1254, 1256-58). His entitlement project seemingly in the remote past, Caponsacchi speaks of his current emulative rescue project as so far beyond it that he has just had "'an impulse'" to drop in on "'the prelate'" (6.1259-61) to mock the bishop's role as it appears to a man with a new revelation that fuels his rescue mission (6.1262-64). Here Caponsacchi's old resentment at having to "'please'" (6.1257) his

official superiors finds expression in a rebellious fantasy of shocking an influential bishop (parent figure) out of his complacent traditionalism (cf. Buckler 150).

The fantasy is also a fantasy of throwing aside, once and for all, his chance of the "'preferment'" (6.1258) to which he feels entitled. Thus it is a fantasy of being free from concern for the world's opinion, of rising above his own lower ambitions (in order to attain higher ones, of course), of escaping his conflicting needs for general adulation and for Pompilia's affirmation. By sharing his fantasy with her, he seeks to make it true in the light of her eyes; to increase, if possible, her appreciation of the sacrifice he is making for her sake; and to prove to her in turn (as well as to himself) the truth of her assumption that he, the strong male, is indeed free of "'susceptibility'" (6.1240) to others' opinion of him. A fantasy of defiance, independence, and strength, it actually reveals his transfer of all his susceptibility to Pompilia, whose recognition of his exceptionality he depends on in order to feel independent and strong.

Caponsacchi's need for Pompilia to see him as above all other men and beyond all rules and traditional roles is thwarted when Pompilia, "hear[ing] the <u>angelus</u>," reminds him that he should "'read / 'The service at this hour,'" a suggestion he does "not like" though he follows it (6.1269-74). Pompilia's continued insistence on Caponsacchi's "role of priest" (Slinn 120; cf. Cook 129) shows neither special "affection" for him (Buckler 149) nor approval for his "liberated cynicism" (Armstrong, "Note" 276) toward the rituals and customs of the church. She wants him to follow the rules, as is

"'proper for us travellers'" (6.1273), and gives not a sign that she thinks he should be an exception. One of Pompilia's main defenses against guilt about her escape is to find or create in her situation such remnants of conventional correctness as she can, while one of Caponsacchi's main defenses is to exempt himself from conventional correctness. Thus Caponsacchi's wish for confirmation of his lofty independence is doomed, in this instance, to meet disappointment: "I did not like that, neither, but I read" (6.1274).

In the next episode of the flight, however, Caponsacchi's differentiations from Pompilia are more satisfying because more compatible with the idealized roles and actions of his rescue project. When he urges her to rest after the first day of the journey, he is all reassuring confidence that they "'are out of harm's reach'" and is ready to protect her while she sleeps (6.1275, 1282-84); but Pompilia's reaction is totally at odds with his: an expression of "misery" and "faintness, like the fawn's / Tired to death in the thicket, when she feels / The probing spear o' the huntsman" (6.1285-88). Being able to perceive her as a weak, innocent, hunted creature emphasizes his contrasting strength and helps him paint his rescue project in the heightened, intense "technicolor" often found in the dreams and fantasies of narcissists whose archaic grandiosity is pressing into their view of reality (Kohut, Analysis 172). Her "fawn's cry"--"'Oh, no stay! / '. . . On to Rome, on, on-- / 'Unless 'tis you who fear,--which cannot be!'" (6.1288-90)--attributes all fear to her and resoundingly affirms his success in playing the idealized role of fearless rescuer.

Pompilia's nightmares, his exorcism of Guido, and her waking fantasy of journeying forever with Caponsacchi draw the priest back toward a regressive mode of union with her. He can relinquish his stance of exaggerated differentiation from Pompilia (and everyone else) in part because she has confirmed his appetite for heroism into temporary satiation; in part because, able now to trust in her attachment to him, he can allow himself the vulnerability of a regressive position characterized by permeable boundaries; in part, surely, because he is physically exhausted and psychically depleted, greatly needing the (delusional) safety of magic words that cast out devils and magic worlds into which devils cannot penetrate. In such a setting, he sees Pompilia and another woman in a walled garden "By the post-house, white and pleasant in the sun" (6.1321-22):

> . . . there she sat: close to her knee,
> A black-eyed child still held the bowl of milk,
> Wondered to see how little she could drink,
> And in her arms the woman's infant lay.
> She smiled at me "How much good this has done!
> "This is a whole night's rest and how much more!
> "I can proceed now, though I wish to stay."
> (6.1329-35)

Here Pompilia appears as the madonna in an enclosed world of innocents, to which she admits Caponsacchi with her precious beam of approval and her affirmation that he has known how to help her.

Back on the road, she first calls him "'my friend'" (6.1341) and shares with him a state of mind which, given his increasing permeability to her mood, reinforces his sense of her need for rescue but at the same time draws him into a strong undercurrent of dread about the outcome of the project. Of the journey, she says that "'There may be more misfortune at the close, / 'And where will you be?

God suffice me then!'" (6.1344-45). The magic garden behind them, Pompilia seems to view the future as inevitably one of abandonment and pain. Her thoughts turn to her concern about what would happen to her soul "'Were [she] surprised and killed here on the spot'" (6.1354), as though she feels Guido may well appear and murder her at any moment.

Pompilia's dread of Guido increasingly colors her narcissistic interchange with Caponsacchi. Coming away from the garden world, she paints the opposing, brutal world of Guido, the trapper-hunter who will "'ill-treat'" a lamb like Pompilia so that her "'cries'" will lure others to "'become [his] prey and spoil'" (6.1362-66). Caponsacchi is not, then, an ancillary target of all this evil; he is as much Guido's intended victim as Pompilia is, and this implication must suggest to Caponsacchi that when she asked where he would be at the end of the journey, the answer she had in mind was that he too would be in "'the trap'" (6.1364). By escaping, she had hoped to avoid having her "'pain / . . . become a snare'" for others (6.1370-71); yet her present fears must convey to her companion that she thinks he is "'snare[d]'" (6.1371) with her now. And now she asks him "'what [she has] done amiss,'" for, she says, "'I cannot trust myself!'" (6.1378-79).

Caponsacchi is aware only of having reacted to all this by being "Taken up wholly with the thought, perhaps," that Pompilia has addressed him as "'my friend'" (6.1381-83). In fact, however, from this speech on he becomes more and more afraid, indicating that he unconsciously responds to the dread and fear below the surface of Pompilia's speech in much the same way that a small child, enmeshed in his mother's emotional state, responds to her feelings: by mirroring

them. As we have seen, her fear of nightmares of Guido makes Caponsacchi afraid, too; but more important, he responds to this fear in a way that reflects Pompilia's underlying fatalism. She has "'pray[ed] it [the journey] finish since it cannot last'" (6.1343) and has conveyed the message that since the end will inevitably be entrapment and death, she might as well get it all over with. Now, permeated by the logic implicit in Pompilia's account of Guido--the logic whereby any attempt at rescue from what seems to be the only trap actually takes place within a larger trap--Caponsacchi prays an echo: for the journey to end with "'repose,'" even if it is the repose of death (6.1393-95).

With Castelnuovo in sight, Caponsacchi attempts to rouse and reinvigorate his active, independent, heroic idealized self by convincing Pompilia--and himself--that the rescue has worked, that there is no larger trap within which they have been travelling the whole time:

> "Already Castelnuovo--Rome!" I cried,
> "As good as Rome,--Rome is the next stage, think!
> "This is where travellers' hearts are wont to beat.
> "Say you are saved, sweet lady!" (6.1400-03)

Over and over he has tried to evoke Pompilia's agreement that he has saved her (6.1202, 1213, 1281-82, 1307-08), for an enthusiastic response from her would help him banish his nagging uneasiness about Guido and would confirm his self-idealization. He has not succeeded, however, perhaps because Pompilia realizes, at some level, that his confidence is not well founded in a realistic assessment of their situation. Given that their slow carriage may have only a few hours' head start and given Guido's temperament, there is an element of

absurdity in statements such as "'We are out of harm's reach, past pursuit'" or "'There probably was no pursuit'" (6.1282, 1307); and no place before Rome is in fact "'As good as Rome'" (6.1401). The priest would like to believe so; but her account of Guido, to which Caponsacchi is so vulnerable when he is enmeshed in her emotional sphere, has led him to doubt his previous judgments that they have escaped. His heroic self is being pulled under by Pompilia's dark feelings; only she can save it by responding to what is, by now, a desperate plea: "'Say you are saved, sweet lady!'" (6.1403).

Pompilia is no help at all, however, for she "scream[s] out" the immanence of doom: "'Take me no farther, I should die: stay here! / 'I have more life to save than mine!'" (6.1406-07). This startling development reverberates with her ominous image of the flight as occurring within a huge trap: now, just outside Rome, they are about to reach its jaws, which will destroy both Pompilia and the other "'life'" she must "'save'" (6.1407). Even if Caponsacchi consciously grasps that Pompilia is referring to herself and the fetus she is carrying--and it is not certain that he has processed what she means (King, Focusing Artifice 148)--his idealized self is vulnerable to a threat of death, for it has been shaken by the effects of his narcissistic union with Pompilia, upon whom he depends for sustenance.

When Pompilia "swoon[s]" after declaring herself in peril of death (6.1408), her deathlike state weakens the priest's confidence to the point that his dread, whose obscure source in his empathic merger with her fears he does not comprehend, seems to be coming over him as though it were a message from an unknown other, so that (seen in a

superstitious mode of hindsight) his feelings later seem to have been an inexplicable prophecy: "what was it foreboded so?" (6.1409). This dread--its effects determined by its genesis in a state of helpless narcissistic dependency, worshipful awe of the self-object Pompilia, and attraction to a peace as perfect as death--proves to be no more help in decision making than was his overinflated confidence.

Caponsacchi's problems with deciding upon and following a course of action demonstrate the adverse practical consequences of his narcissistic entanglements with Pompilia. He indulges his attraction to deathlike escapes from troubling reality by glorifying both the unconscious woman--"The motionless and breathless pure and pale / Pompilia"--and her enviable state as she lies "on a couch" at the inn, "still calm and cured / By deep sleep of all woes at once" (6.1411-14). Now she most resembles one of the dead martyrs of his earlier fantasy, and his veneration of Pompilia reveals its kinship to the veneration of death. His memory of himself, bearing her "through a pitying group" of onlookers (6.1412) in a scene recalling religious paintings of the crucified Christ being borne from Calvary and of martyrs being brought to their tombs, reveals a disquieting shift from the rescuer's role toward the role of privileged witness to a saint's sufferings and sanctity. This role binds him in fascination to Pompilia's immediate condition rather than moving him to change the present situation so as to accomplish the major objective of getting her to Rome.

Reinforcing his tendency to contemplation of the scene rather than action in the crisis is his openness to suggestion, which has been increased by his near-merger with Pompilia. His permeability makes him

vulnerable to the advice of others whose judgment is based on incomplete knowledge of the situation. Thus he is unduly influenced by the innkeeper's "urgent 'Let her stay an hour or two! / 'Leave her to us, all will be right by morn!'" (6.1415-16). The innkeeper can see the peril of Pompilia's exhaustion but has no way of knowing that a second peril--Guido--must also be considered. Caponsacchi is aware of the second peril--"Oh, my foreboding!"--"But," as he recalls, "I could not choose" (6.1417).

Caponsacchi's decision would be difficult for anyone to make. The significant point is that he seems unable to weigh the danger of taking Pompilia on to Rome relative to the danger of being overtaken by Guido; unable to see any alternatives except either going on immediately or staying at the inn "all night long," from sunset until just before sunrise (6.1418, 1430); unable to separate himself from Pompilia's vicinity and condition despite reassurance that she is all right (6.1418-19) even though his growing fear and "sense of . . . impending woe" (6.1421-23) suggest that watching for Guido and preparing to evade or reckon with him would be a wise priority. As it is, Caponsacchi acts only when his fear becomes so overwhelming that he must do <u>something</u>; and in his fear, he can conceive of no action beyond a flight that is very nearly a word-for-word replay of the departure from Arezzo (cf. 1147-49 and 1425-29). He is still limited to the strategy of exhorting and paying others to do what is to be done.

Now, frozen into repetition of a single strategy, he is also weakened by the heightened archaic narcissism that has been activated in his transference relationship with Pompilia. His sense of his

personal boundaries is uncertain: in the course of the journey he has been the embedded, enraptured infant, drawn within the emotional sphere of an awesome parent-god; and under her warming gaze he has been also the exhibitionistic, powerful infant, drawing the parent-god (and even God) into his admiring audience. These intense experiences, which have released rapidly changing currents of archaic psychic forces, have on the one hand increased Caponsacchi's vulnerability to invasion by other personalities, his sensitivity to others' view of him, and thus his proneness to ineffectual, inarticulate collapse into passivity when he is under pressure from the external world; on the other hand, they have increased his sense of superiority to people other than Pompilia, his grandiose mythification of his experience, and his trust in the power of his magic thoughts and words to work his will and impress his version of truth upon others. These traits prove to be his nemesis when, at "the last minute" before he goes to awaken Pompilia to finish their journey, he "turn[s]" around and "Face[s] . . . Count Guido" (6.1431-34).

V

Guido speaks first, mounting an attack on Caponsacchi's self-idealization, on his idealization of Pompilia, and on his glorious myth of heroic rescue. Addressing Caponsacchi as "'your priestship'" (6.1442)--showing already a keen insight into the priest's neurotic pride in his superior social and spiritual status--Guido drags up his opponent's attentions toward women in the recent past by remarking on the Aretine women's distress at Caponsacchi's departure (6.1444-48). To this view of the priest, which thrusts the low memory of his

relationships with other women into juxtaposition with his relationship to Pompilia and threatens the priest's image of himself as the ever-pure and faithful rescuer, Guido adds an iconoclastic portrait of Pompilia as a ruthless woman who drugged her spouse in order to run away with Caponsacchi (6.1451-54).

Far from providing Caponsacchi an empathic audience like Pompilia or even the "pitying group" (6.1412) who earlier surrounded the couple at the inn, Guido breaks the mirror that has reflected the priest as the heroic agent of providence, sent to rescue a saint from Satan's grasp. Guido sets up a different mirror, an alternative myth in which he and Caponsacchi appear as "'Vulcan pursuing Mars'" (6.1459) to reclaim no saintly spouse, but a very fleshly Venus; and Guido succeeds in making this assignment of mythic roles seem true to his surrounding audience, members of "'The Commissary and the unpoisoned arm / 'O' the Civil Force'" (6.1462-63). Casting Caponsacchi as "'the lover in the smart disguise / 'With the sword'" and Pompilia as "'my wife the runaway, / 'His leman,'" he directs his audience to "'Arrest and hold'" Caponsacchi, and they do it (6.1465-68, 1471). Caponsacchi's myth, which for him has come to seem so true as to be self-evident, is swept aside by events, and he finds himself moving--no heroic reflection--among the figures in his enemy's mirror.

The depth and strength of Caponsacchi's need to maintain his own myth and to protect his conviction of his and Pompilia's obvious superiority are evidenced by his initial reaction to Guido's version of things. This reaction is not to defend himself and Pompilia by interrupting and refuting Guido as soon and as clearly as possible, for

Guido presents his story uninterrupted by so much as a peep from the priest, who seems, as Buckler says, to be "paralyzed into speechlessness and inaction by" Guido's verbal attack (154). This paralysis resembles the passive, inarticulate state that he has experienced when Pompilia's gaze overwhelmed his separate existence by penetrating his personal boundaries. This time, however, the powerful presence that surprises him into awe is a baneful figure from Pompilia's nightmares whose presence triggers a regressive defense.

Thus while Guido is fitting his myth of Vulcan, Mars, and Venus to the actual appearance of the situation and effectively influencing the behavior of the authorities, Caponsacchi is not even thinking primarily "of what a blasphemy was dared" (6.1483), for these thoughts predominate later, when he looks back at the experience. His first reaction is instead to wish away his intense discomfort by hallucinating its transformation into comedy. So he thinks "how splendidly / Mirthful, how ludicrous a lie was launched"--a story fit for "Moliere's self" (6.1485-87).

The priest cannot allow himself to see how Guido's version of reality could possibly seem true to anyone: if people take Guido seriously, his discomfort cannot be removed; so he must assure himself that no one could take Guido seriously. How could anyone think that "such woman" as Pompilia is the "wife" of "such man" (6.1487-88)? That Guido and Pompilia are married is obviously irrelevant. How could anyone fail to know that Pompilia is "divine," not even capable of having "poisoned" and "plundered" her husband, let alone of having committed adultery (6.1490, 1494-95)? That the people have only seen

her when Caponsacchi carried her in unconscious and know that they arrived together; that the authorities have only seen Caponsacchi preparing to leave the inn with her: these facts should by no means affect their recognition of her saintliness. How could anyone fail to see that Guido is a "beast" whose very utterance of "her name" is tantamount to desecration of the sacrament (6.1492-94)? People should recognize the devil when they see him. Caponsacchi's thoughts surely will control the reactions of other people; for his thoughts are surely omnipotent.

Moreover, "what [he] wishe[s]" will surely happen: Guido will repeat what he has said, and someone will give him what he deserves, "The fist's reply to the filth" (6.1495-98). The magic wishes of Caponsacchi will surely be fulfilled by an obliging world, so that without any overt effort from him, Guido will be punished by other people. And with Guido gone, there will be a happy ending. Caponsacchi's "inward laughter" at the situation is therefore not, as Wilt argues, the result of his seeing it "correctly" (351), but the result of his seeing it narcissistically, as it appears to one in the grip of infantile illusions of omnipotence. Waiting for the world to begin to laugh with him and to sweep Guido's "filth" (6.1498) away, he now turns expectantly to that world and sees the reality of his and Pompilia's situation as he surveys the response of the audience--the narcissist's perpetual guide, the ruler of his moods and actions. He sees reflected there not the success of his own wish, but the success of Guido's performance (6.1500-04). As Buckler points out, Caponsacchi now sees his "myth . . . collapsing into the austere truth" (154):

that others are not under the sway of his mind; that his best opportunity for "abolish[ing]" Guido "with his lie"--by strangling him--has passed (6.1474-77); and that, following Guido's order to "'catch her!'" (6.1505), the officers are about to go after Pompilia.

The threatened arrest of Pompilia "sober[s]" Caponsacchi, who has had some time to recover himself from the regressive impulses brought on by the shock of encountering Guido and has discerned that he is surrounded, as he has so often been, with an audience he must win over. If he cannot cut off Guido's words forever by strangling him, he might at least cut him off verbally by interrupting his speech, stealing his scene, and outperforming him. Aiming now at vindication of himself and Pompilia--at the rescue of their idealized images--he proposes a great dramatic scene in which he, as "'somebody, / . . . a priest and privileged'" (6.1507-08), claims the male lead as well as the roles of playwright and director. He will "'lead the way'" to Pompilia (6.1506) and meet her center stage; then the response of the audience, its attention riveted on that meeting, will resolve the issue: "'Detect / 'Guilt on her face when it meets mine, then judge / 'Between us and the mad dog howling there!'" (6.1511-13).

This is a narcissistic fantasy of being vindicated by having one's superiority recognized by a circle of discriminating admirers, but reality does not honor Caponsacchi's claim to actualize his fantasy. They "all [go] together" to Pompilia's room, Caponsacchi not in the lead, and the intended audience takes over the central action by breaking in (6.1514-15). His attempt to master the situation by winning over the audience ends quickly as the sight of Pompilia plunges

him back into his now-customary state of passive veneration of his divine self-object. Pompilia lies "composed" (6.1516),

> still breathless, motionless, sleep's self,
> Wax-white, seraphic, saturate with the sun
> O' the morning that now flooded from the front
> And filled the window with a light like blood.
> (6.1517-20)

Caponsacchi is once more the witness to Pompilia's sanctity, the privileged worshipper at the side of the crucified Christ or martyr's corpse that is not dead, but only sleeping. His impulse toward performance drained from him, he is after all but a member of the audience as Guido reclaims the stage and the director's role with his interpretation of the tableau: "'Behold the poisoner, the adulteress, / 'And feigning sleep too! Seize, bind!'" (6.1521-22). Guido and Pompilia, not Caponsacchi and Pompilia, play the climactic confrontation scene as the priest stands "i' the doorway" (6.1534).

Pompilia's performance in the confrontation provides Caponsacchi the material for his most intense glorification of Pompilia and bestows upon him the resounding confirmation of his emulative idealized image that fortifies him to make one last attempt to save his project. Her instantaneous transition from death-like sleep to an "erect, face to face" confrontation with Guido bears no small resemblance to a Christ-like resurrection, in response to which death or the devil falls "back" (6.1523-27). Pompilia's denunciation of Guido confirms him as a devil worse than the hell he comes from: "'Away from between me and hell!' she crie[s]," apparently mistaking the sunrise for hellfire because Guido has appeared with it (Cook 131); "'Hell for me, no embracing any more!'" (6.1528-29). She "'love[s] God'" and accepts His "'utterly

most just award,'" even if it is hell; "'But [she will] bear no more love-making devils . . . !'" (6.1530-32).

Pompilia's behavior magnifies both her goodness and Guido's badness, thus confirming the rightness of Caponsacchi's rescue project and the mythic status of that project within the moral cosmos. When "the rabble" (6.1537) humiliate Caponsacchi by holding him back from joining her, Pompilia's response restores his pride by characterizing the commoners' behavior as an "'outrage'" and confirms his self-idealization in terms far greater, more glorious, and more exclusive that any she has used previously: she calls him "'my sole friend, / 'Guardian and saviour'" (6.1541-42).

She is so convinced of his perfection that she feels she is God's instrument in her attempt to "'baulk'" Guido and the authorities of arresting him, snatching Guido's sword and "brandish[ing] it" as she cries out to her husband, "'die, . . . devil, in God's name'" (6.1545-46). Though she is quickly "disarmed," Guido is temporarily "spike[d]" by "her word" (6.1549-51). Certainly at this point the priest's "role would seem passive compared to Pompilia's," as Gridley notes ("Browning's Caponsacchi" 291). What is important to Caponsacchi, however, is that her words and actions in his defense prove beyond any doubt that she, in all her glory, values him as he wishes her to.

Now magnificently confirmed, Caponsacchi gains confidence and becomes better able to give up magic thinking in coping with the situation. When Guido tries to recover center stage and give the authorities orders, the priest quickly gathers that Guido is succeeding with the audience, sees what approach will serve him best

under the circumstances (6.1570-71), and effectively seizes the stage. Now fully identified with his idealized self, he openly asserts his claims. He opens on an ominously (if vaguely) imperious note: "'What I say, / 'Slight at your peril!'" (6.1571-72). His reactivated sense of entitlement speaks: he and Guido are "'called noble both,'" but he is "'the nobler, and a name men know'"; as "'A Tuscan noble,'" he "'might claim the Duke'" in his and Guido's "'own country'" to judge the "'cause'" at hand (6.1573-76, 1582). Having asserted his social superiority to Guido, Caponsacchi raises himself higher yet, citing his clerical status as an indisputable claim to pick the "'jurisdiction'" he "'prefer[s]'" (6.1576-77): the church will "'Cover the wronged with her inviolate shield'" (6.1584). He need not account for his "'secular garb'" now; though his "'reasons'" for it are "'good,'" he no longer defers to his current, secular audience to judge the matter, for they are not qualified for the task (6.1578-79). He will account for himself "'in due time,'" not now; "'to [his] peers'" in Rome, not to his inferiors here in Castelnuovo, from whom he has the right simply to "'demand'" that he and Pompilia be taken to Rome (6.1579-81). And (raising himself even higher) he wishes to go to Rome not because he fears the alternative, the Tuscan court, or because he must, but because--here he recycles a concept from his bishop's old script for him (6.305-08)--he gives up his "'claim'" to worldly influence and "'choose[s] the Church'" (6.1582-83).

Caponsacchi's performance is effective: he and Pompilia are taken to Rome for trial. It seems safe to say that Caponsacchi goes there under the influence of a new fantasy, a fantasy of vindication

that underlies the image of Roman justice expressed in his last speech at Castelnuovo. The fantasy is built upon a submerged assumption that officials of "'the Church [he] serve[s],'" asked to "'decide / 'Between'" him and Guido, will somehow be obligated to do what their priestly colleague "'bid[s]'" them to do (6.1580-81, 1583). Like Guido, Caponsacchi feels his past service to the church has fulfilled his part of an implicit bargain, the church's part of which is that it will favor him in an emergency. This assumption, in Caponsacchi's case, has just been validated by the secular authorities who have deferred to its institutionalization in the form of clerical privilege.

In the current emergency--so Caponsacchi's fantasy goes--he and Guido will appear before a church court; he will set forth his view of the case to his "'peers,'" the judges (6.1579); seeing that he and Pompilia are good and Guido evil, they will "'right the slandered lady'" Pompilia and henceforth protect her (and perhaps him) by "'Cover[ing] the wronged with her [the church's] inviolate shield'" (6.1581, 1584). Caponsacchi is evidently thinking of the church as a magic, all-powerful parent (she is not only the bride of Christ, but also the mother of the faithful) who, like the mother of the narcissistically enraptured infant, seems to know her child's being with perfect empathy and to respond to its needs with unfailing adequacy. He is thinking of the church also as the ultimate champion of "'wronged'" (6.1584) innocents like Pompilia (and himself, with his "'reasons good'" [6.1578]); he is thinking of the church militant as the chivalric rescuer carrying "'her inviolate shield'" into a trial

by combat (6.1584). As an innocent and faithful son of the church, Caponsacchi is potentially the beneficiary of the mother-champion's intervention; as a priest, he is at the same time part of her, so that by thinking of himself as "'bid[ding] Rome'" to "'right the slandered lady'" (6.1583, 1581), he preserves his position as Pompilia's rescuer--indeed enhances it by making the church his surrogate.

The elements of his fantasy that cast the church as mother-champion thus address both his regressive narcissistic need to nourish and expand himself though union with a warming, caring, powerful self-object and his relatively differentiated need to carry out his rescue project. The most conspicuous element of the fantasy, however, casts the church as the judge whose approval will conspicuously vindicate Pompilia, his project, and most of all <u>him</u> by publicly "'decid[ing] / 'Between'" him and Guido (6.1580-81) in his favor. He will thus receive the confirmation that was denied him when his audience at the inn rejected his script for a great vindication scene; in fact, the confirmation will be much better and more valuable because it will come from a far higher source--not common bystanders and petty secular officials, but the church herself, whose magnificence the fantasy has so well emphasized.

Despite all his prideful rejections of limiting social roles and despite all his previous exhibitionistic declarations of independence from the outmoded authorities of the church, Caponsacchi remains a narcissist who, because of his overpowering need for the admiring approval of an audience, must gather those outmoded others round him by invoking his participation in the limiting role that ties him to them--

his role as a priest. He must glorify them to valorize their approval; and he must finally depend on them to give him what he needs. However much he aspires to transcend the limits placed on others, to grow so large that they cannot even comprehend him, he can never outgrow his need for their adulation: his transcendence must always be confined by his accommodations to an audience; he must always descend eventually toward their level, eventually shrink toward mere life size to make his case for them; he must always live within the narcissistic bind.

Thus, as Caponsacchi approaches his and Pompilia's trial for adultery, he is riding high on the confirmation of his self-idealization that he has gotten from Pompilia's defense of him and from his success at getting the issue taken to the Roman court; he is harboring a claim that the judges should repay his service to the church by treating him as a favored son; and he is cherishing fantasies that they will understand the elopement just as he does, order the church's power to flow through the channel of his rescue project, and resoundingly vindicate that project and confirm the greatness of the man who conceived it and carried it out. These expectations take on additional urgency from the fact that failure of the court to meet them would retroactively undercut even the confirmation and success he has already had: if the court fails to "'right the slandered lady'" (6.1581), Pompilia may no longer regard him as her "'saviour'" (6.1542); and he will no longer be able to regard the response to his Castelnuovo performance as a victory. His need for the court's confirmation and vindication of him is therefore extraordinarily powerful. At the same time, however, his chances of getting that

powerful need fulfilled are decreased by his continuing tendency to think and respond in regressive ways when he is under pressure--both from external demands imposed by the situation and from the additional anxiety generated by the extraordinarily heavy psychic stake he has riding on the outcome of the case.

Thus Caponsacchi is painfully susceptible to the judges' actual response to him. He experiences them as insensitive parents who do not gaze at him with warm appreciation, but instead look down on him with amusement--"laugh" at him (6.10)--as they substitute their patronizing, preconceived idea of him for the idea of him which, Caponsacchi believes, they would get if they attempted to understand him empathically. As befits a narcissist, a performer, he is agonizingly sensitive to their inappropriate response to his "tale." He registers each "shrug" and "smirk," each "titter" or smile ill veiled by some movement of the hand over the face; and he finds in these gestures evidence of a shallow misinterpretation of his whole being: "'The sly one,'" he imagines them thinking, "'all this we are bound believe! / 'Well, he can say no other than what he says. / 'We have been young, too,--come, there's greater guilt!'" (6.14-21).

This supposed attitude reflects favoritism toward Caponsacchi, as he has wanted and expected, but not the kind he desires. He "show[s]" the judges "how it came to be [his] part / To save the lady" (6.1649-50), and what do they do? They go on to question him about the "pack of stupid and impure / Banalities called letters about love" as though he and Pompilia might actually have written them; they question him about his alleged "'clandestine visits'" to Pompilia as though they

might actually have been having an affair; they question him about the allegation that he and Pompilia engaged in "'kissings in the coach'" as though these two attractive young people might actually have kissed each other (6.1651-52, 1674, 1696). The problem he had at Castelnuovo is continuing: he cannot conceive of the way the circumstances of the flight appear to outsiders; so he is unable to deal with the stress of the judges' skeptical questions.

They question him: that is what offends him most. How can they possibly question him about these matters when he began by "show[ing]" them (6.1649) exactly how it all really was? What he needs--and therefore claims--is the judges' immediate, unqualified acceptance of his initial account of the matter. That is the favor he feels he is owed in exchange for his service to the church; that is the mirroring response he should receive from the fantasized Mother Church, as he has regressively defined her; that is the ringing vindication due him for being his heroic idealized self. And none of it is forthcoming. The wonderful embedded experience of his union with Pompilia as his sublime audience has been taken away; even his fantasy of recapturing a similar if lesser union with the court has evaporated. The judges simply do not appreciate him.

Caponsacchi's answers reflect the rage he feels at the judges' failure to live up to his expectations and at the narcissistic wounds they are inflicting upon him. It is possible that these answers are not the ones he actually gives aloud (see 1.1064-66); their importance lies in their defensive function, which is not much affected by whether or not he bites his tongue and only thinks them. He defends himself

against the judges' insulting skepticism, against their obvious failure to see him correctly (as his idealized self), by thinking or giving answers like those Guido gives at his murder trial: angry proclamations of his superiority and the rightness of his project issued from the heights of his self-idealization. He thus aggressively asserts (at least to himself) the exceptional qualities that they so inappropriately ignore.

Look at these love letters, they say; "'--How was it that a wife, young, innocent, / 'And stranger to your person, wrote this page?'" (6.1655-56). "'--She wrote it when the Holy Father wrote / 'The bestiality that posts thro' Rome, / 'Put in his mouth by Pasquin'" (6.1657-59), he replies, thus raising the object of his rescue to the status of the Pope and on that basis, dismissing the judges' concern by labelling the "'page'" (6.1656) a piece of bawdy satire, the "'bestiality'" (6.1658) of which proves that someone other than Pompilia must have written it. The answer is no doubt effective as a psychological defense, since its analogy bolsters his sense of Pompilia's sanctity, accuses the judges of insensitivity bordering on sacrilege, and sets him up as the only defender of the faith present in the room; but he has begged the question the judges are interested in by assuming that Pompilia is the moral and spiritual equal of the Pope.

They try another question: what about "'these answers'" to the letters, written in his "'hand'" (6.1660-61)? He does point out a couple of the letters in which the handwriting is obviously "'A clumsy mimic'" of his; but he cannot refrain from heaping scorn on the "'precious piece of verse'" in one letter or resist adding that "'When

Saint John wrote / 'The tract "De Tribus,"'" a heretical work, he "'wrote this to match'" (6.1662-67). Rather than focusing on the forgery issue, he asserts his literary taste and his saintly purity.

And so he continues, sprinkling his testimony with sarcastic jibes and interrupting the questioners with ironic restatements of their points (6.1676-77, 1698, 1701-03). The problem throughout is that Caponsacchi does not defend himself and Pompilia by dealing carefully with the false evidence from Guido's camp so much as he defends his pride, which for the narcissistic person is more himself than himself. He recalls ending his testimony by saying, "'For me, no word in my defence I speak, / 'And God shall argue for the lady!'" (6.1705-06). Thus he clearly signals the neurotic claims that he is so angry at the court for not honoring: the claims that someone like him should not have to defend himself against such ridiculous and demeaning allegations and that God should take care of defending Pompilia. Underlying these claims, of course, are the disappointment of his expectation of perfect understanding from the court as idealized mother and still another fantasy of vindication (replacing his fantasy of summoning the church to Pompilia's aid) in which he brings in God Himself to be Pompilia's champion--a fantasy that he no doubt hopes will warn the judges that his Father is going to get all his opponents--Guido and judges alike.

Against the background of Caponsacchi's thwarted claims, unfulfilled vindication fantasies, and desperate need for the court's confirmation of him and his viewpoint, it becomes clear why Caponsacchi so greatly resents the mild punishment the court doles out to him in

the end, resents it at least as much as he would have resented a severe sentence. Of course, receiving any punishment at all means he has not been vindicated; but in addition, he is terribly hurt by what he believes to have been the assumptions and reasoning behind the judges' decision. They have assumed, he feels, that he could not really be innocent of the adultery charge and did not have high motives in fleeing Arezzo with Pompilia. Ever alert to his audience, he has gauged their response to his testimony as "smiling disbelief, / Polite impossibility of faith / In such affected virtue in a priest" (6.1709-11). The judges have seen him as "pretend[ing] . . . to be pure / Honest and Christian" to get out of "the scrape" he is in (6.1717-18, 23). Worse, their offensive assumptions underlie their reasoning that he is "no worse than others after all" (6.1713). This conclusion implies a dreadful thing: that they regard him as no better than others. For one who regards himself--who <u>must</u> regard himself--as far superior to others, to be seen as <u>like</u> them is to be degraded, "To go with the herd, be hog no more nor less" than they are (6.1723).

Regarded as one of the "hogs in common herd" (6.1724), Caponsacchi not only cannot be vindicated as greatly good, but also cannot be condemned as greatly guilty. The judges, he believes, attribute to him a mediocre guilt. They see it as mitigated by immaturity: he imagines them thinking, "'We have been young, too,--come, there's greater guilt!'" (6.21). He feels they are decreasing his stature by interpreting his actions in terms of cliches commonly applied to adolescent behavior: he "just romanced a little, sowed wild oats" (6.1726). They even seem to reduce the importance of his

supposed oat-sowing by considering that after all, he avoided publicity (6.1714-15, 1727)--an unappealing thought for a man who feels he has played his part before a packed house of angels and archbishops.

The judges' "fair play" toward him leaves his status ambiguous. There was "Undoubtedly--some toying with the wife," but not "ruffian violence and rape"; there were "The intrigue, the elopement, the disguise," but "The letters and the verse looked hardly like the truth" (6.1712, 1730-31, 1733-34). Their decision attributes to him "guilt enough / To be compatible with innocence, / So, punished best a little and not too much" (6.1735-37). Having been seen as ordinary, Caponsacchi is further humiliated by a "jocular piece of punishment": being "sent to lounge a little" at Civita (6.30-31). To the injury the judges do him by failing to vindicate him, they add the insult of "indulgence" (6.1712), letting him off by patronizingly slapping his hand as though he were a kid who had pulled a boyish prank. He has thus been done a real injustice but deprived of the chance to remythify the judges as devils and himself as a martyr. He cannot become a Christian hero by being "punished . . . the merry way" (6.45).

The outcome of the adultery trial thus sends Caponsacchi to Civita with his solution severely threatened. He feels that he has kept his side of his bargain with fate: on the whole, he has shown by his actions that he is his emulative idealized self, and on the whole he has held on to that view of himself. Yet the judges have not responded to his claims by validating his greatness. As Buckler notes, he "feel[s] abused" and "grossly devalued" (141); but even though he tries to transform these feelings into an objectively existing

martyrdom of "public reprobation" in the hostile glare of "the sunshine which men see to pelt [him] by" (6.1834-35), it is difficult for him to maintain the stance of a Saint Stephen when in fact his "Friends c[o]me round," not bringing stones to throw at him but "Congratulat[ing]" him on the outcome of the trial (6.1740-41) and comforting him (they think) by saying that everyone knows his misdoing was not too serious (6.1741-45). This is no comfort, of course, for Caponsacchi needs to be seen as having done no wrong at all, but rather an exceptional right; needs to have Pompilia seen as a glorious saint, not a "'wife'" discontented with her domestic arrangements; and needs to have Guido seen as deserving all the punishment, not a "'share'" (6.1743-44).

To make matters worse, the priest's friends unwittingly exacerbate his sense of being unappreciated by laying out for him a program to "'amuse the time'" in Civita, a program totally unworthy of the great man he must continue to believe he is. He is Pompilia's savior--and they suggest he should "'Travesty us "De Raptu Helenae"'"; he is innocent of any wrongdoing--and they tactfully admit that he had better "'Do [the poem] in Latin'" because the "'funny figure . . . the husband cut[s] / 'When the wife makes him skip'" is "'Too ticklish'" a subject for him to write about in Italian; he has performed his rescue role to win the approval of Pompilia, the angels, God--and they want him to make a metrical error in the poem so that "'his Eminence'" (a mere church official) can "'rectify it, be [Caponsacchi's] friend for life!'" (6.1746-53).

The priest's friends no doubt have in mind his restoration to his former position on the preferment track, which he must indeed follow if

he is to get the ecclesiastical power that he himself has felt entitled to attain. Their suggestions make it painfully clear, however, that he can hope to gain from the people around him and those at Civita confirmation only of low, contemptible performances similar to those he gave in Arezzo; that they are not going to confirm his spiritual greatness; that in losing access to Pompilia he has lost the only audience which could offer him such confirmation--enough of it to compensate for the loss of others' approval; that he has no new mission now, no further service to do for Pompilia, nothing to do except go back to amusing the authority figures upon whom he is, after all, dependent. In this situation there is a great deal of psychological suffering for Caponsacchi, but no chance for martyrdom; a good deal of activity, but no chance for heroic action. His former bishop was right: "'Nobody wants [him] in these latter days / 'To prop the Church by breaking [his] backbone . . .'" (6.291-92).

Whether Caponsacchi does in fact return to the writing of witty poems during his exile in Civita he does not say. He says a good deal to indicate that his main activity there--and in this he is much like Guido--is the cultivation of the hurt pride and anger proceeding from the narcissistic wound he has suffered. His later description of his reaction to the court's decision conveys his rage at the humiliation of having to go obediently into exile:

> I, priest, coxcomb, fribble and fool,
> Ensconced me in my corner, thus rebuked,
> A kind of culprit, over-zealous hound
> Kicked for his pains to kennel. . . . (6.98-101)

Far from showing "acceptance of [the] court's unjust sentence" (Boo 181), he evidently spends his kennel time going over and over the

sentence. Preoccupied with having been misunderstood, unappreciated, underestimated, he attempts to restore his pride and to bolster his sense of superiority by developing a devastating critique of the system that has wounded him--the critique that he is prepared to offer later, when he tells the judges they may "depend on [him] for much new light / Thrown on the justice and religion here / By this proceeding [the adultery trial and his sentence], much fresh food for thought!" (6.1754-56).

Caponsacchi has discovered that revisionist analysis of powerful institutions can be a superb tool for self-justification and for revenge through "study" of "how [the judges] read the rules" (6.1757, 1759). With such "chewing [of] his cud," as Buckler puts it, he "redeem[s] his self-inflation" (141) by a legalistic picking-over of the trial and sentence. The thoroughness of his study is evident when he emerges from exile as a friend of the court, well prepared with his "point[s] involving law" (6.2007). Though the analysis developed from his rehashing and re-rehashing the trial may be in large measure, as Buckler says, "a distempered fairy tale" (149), the activity of analyzing offers the priest some sense of triumph through intellect. He needs that defense, for since he cannot worship Pompilia in person, cannot even communicate with her, his memories of her and the confirmation she gave him are the only other source of satisfaction he has--except for his belief that <u>he has saved her</u>.

In the Caponsacchi who has moved from high society to humiliating exile we may observe the outcome of a development in which family privilege has been transformed into narcissistic convictions of

entitlement, family and institutional expectations and rewards into a conformity-prone, confirmation-dependent way of relating to the world, and an ancestral exemplar of self-effacement into a vague but expansive idealized self that seeks its own revelation in some spectacular enactment of heroic sanctity. In him we may also observe the power of the untransformed: of the archaic idealizing energies that choose his self-object and focus his project for him; of the archaic grandiosity that manifests its delusive convictions of omnipotence and perfection in his execution and defense of that project; and of the combinations of these archaic forces that draw him into regressive, unrealistic, and at times paralyzing narcissistic transferences whose destructive potential is the dark underside of the illusory sense of transcendence they can confer. In the monologuist most frequently taken as his creator's autobiographical mirror, the contradictory patterns and complicated modes of narcissistic experience are reflected in a mimetic portrait as empathically magnetic as it is psychologically intelligible.

CHAPTER 6
CAPONSACCHI: THE FAILURE OF IDEALIZED AUTOBIOGRAPHY

As surely as Browning's mimetic portrayal of Caponsacchi's development and character structure reflects the patterns and modes of narcissistic experience, the form and movement of his monologue in the fictive present of the speech reflect the vicissitudes of narcissistic psychodynamics under the pressure of a severe narcissistic wound. The news of Guido's crime destroys the partial success of Caponsacchi's project and delivers a terrific blow to his idealized image. With his defense system so profoundly threatened, inner conflicts that were temporarily controlled and pacified by the elopement and barely contained during his exile are aroused and mirrored in the extreme volatility of his monologue.

Not only in the beginning, when he has just received the terrible news, but throughout, the speech threatens to fly apart as his tone swings rapidly from rage and vindictiveness, to helpless pathos, and back again; as his attitudes toward the listening judges and himself alter radically from moment to moment, creating a wilderness of contradictions; as his attempt to give a connected account of what happened repeatedly digresses from its intent or disintegrates into almost random memory fragments. It is the kind of discourse that prompts us to say someone is "coming unglued" or "going to pieces."

These qualities of his monologue arise from the psychodynamics of the narcissistic bind, within which he shunts back and forth between the extremes of appeasement and grandiosity. Attempting to escape from the self-hate generated by the failure of his search for glory, Caponsacchi tries in the course of his monologue to revise and rebuild his self-idealization and his defense system, only to meet in the end the failure of idealized autobiography.

I

When his monologue opens, Caponsacchi is still reeling from the "clap" of "thunder" (6.1759-60) that has assaulted his horrified ears. He is staggered not only by shock at the crime, "this sudden smoke from hell" (6.2), but also by its impact upon his already precarious psychic situation. A great burden of irony has crashed down upon him: circumstances have spectacularly vindicated him (cf. Yetman 20), but at the expense of Pompilia's suffering and imminent death and the failure of his project. Vindication thus threatens to destroy the idealized self for which he has sought vindication. In addition, as Wilt points out, no "field of action" in which he can play his rescuer's role seems to remain (343). The one arena left to him is the courtroom to which he has been recalled, where asserting a psychologically restorative version of a past reality is the sole available action.

Since Caponsacchi's "action and . . . identity" as Pompilia's actual rescuer are "failures" (Slinn 117), this new linguistic version of his rescue project will be difficult. Yet there are limited alternatives to this rescue through words--through revision and redefinition and refiguration. For example, his adopting a

self-effacing solution in response to the failure of his expansive one is unlikely because the court's failure to protect Pompilia, a conspicuously self-effacing person, undermines the credibility of the self-effacing bargain: the world has not protected her goodness or yielded to its influence in the way it once yielded to the goodness of his great-uncle. Nor does he have the opportunity to hear Pompilia's account of him, which would overwhelmingly confirm his emulative idealized self; he must try to rebuild or revise his defense system without her help.

In order to do so, he needs to justify his intervention in Pompilia's situation and to externalize blame for the outcome (cf. Buckler 135). He needs to establish Pompilia's sanctity, since the greatness of his rescue project hinges for him upon her worthiness. To preserve his search for glory, he needs to see this project as having been in some sense successful. He needs once again to see himself as an idealized self and to be seen in that way; he needs confirmation, and this is why it is not true that the judges' "belief" in him "can do him no good" (Mermin 65). He needs to envision some future for whatever idealized self he can save or construct; he needs to build a solution that will work. Throughout his monologue these needs demand that he find a train of thought and emotion to fulfill all of them. But he is full of ambivalence and conflicting impulses that continually disrupt his thoughts and shift his emotional stance in relation to his subject and his audience. From the interplay between his relatively stable needs and his psychic disequilibrium, the shape of his monologue emerges.

By following the movement of Caponsacchi's conflicting impulses, we will come to understand the psychological basis of the disjointed argument and the shifting, contradictory tones that have evoked comment from many readers of his monologue. Sullivan most fully describes the qualities that prevent Caponsacchi's monologue from being "a rhetorical argument" like Guido's speech to the court: it is not "narrative" or "a defence"; it "lacks clarity and coherence" and "logical progression"; it lacks control over emphasis, "hammer[ing] away at trivial points and pass[ing] over more significant ones"; and it "repeatedly digresses" into angry "harangues against the negligent judges" (76-77, 83).

As for the tone, it is a rare soul who finds "the whole monologue . . . a piece of supreme poetry, steeped in lyrical light" (Buchanan 319). Most commentators have seen Caponsacchi's tone as "erratic" (Hassett 67) and full of "constant conflict" (Cook 113). Sullivan, for example, contrasts the "violent," "reckless, bitter, and denunciatory" language of his "'worldly'" side with the "quiet, respectful, and tender" language of the priest's "'spiritual'" side and suggests that the first is used in reference to "Guido and the earlier decision of the judges" and the second in reference to Pompilia (75, 81n). Buckler sees Caponsacchi's language as reflecting "phases of firmness and collapse" in which he is "arrogant, self-righteous, abusively angry," and "ferociously judgmental," then "self-pitying" and "guilt-ridden in the name of humility" (157). Wilt refers to the contrasting tonal poles as "hysteria" and "sobriety" (349). All these formulations, taken with Sullivan's observations on the monologue's lack of

argumentative structure, suggest that inner tensions and conflicts generate his utterances and that the psychic task he faces, rather than his ostensible "purpose" of "inform[ing]" the judges (Hair 147), dominates his speech.

As the monologue opens, Caponsacchi is reacting to the news of Guido's crime with rage at this latest and most severe narcissistic wound, compounded by the rage that he has covertly nursed in exile. The horrible turn of events adds to and releases this "resentment toward [the] judges" (Buckler 135), shocks aside his cautiousness about expressing it, and gives him an excuse to vent all his rage "with impunity" (Buckler 135-36).

The dominance of pride-restoring, defensive motives in his anger is soon evident. The focus of his righteousness quickly changes from Pompilia's murder to his bitter memory of having "stood and told" his story "Six months ago" to the "same three [judges] in this very room" while they "As good as laugh[ed]" at him (6.2, 7-9). Now he is in a position to criticize their attitude and to express his contempt by drawing a simple contrast: "now no one laughs" (6.9). He vividly recalls their ill-concealed amusement and their supposed tendency to excuse him for what they believed to be a sexual escapade because "'We have been young, too'" (6.21), recollections implying that the judges' "mood" (6.13), not the priest's, was lascivious, and that they assumed Caponsacchi guilty because of their own past sins. They are not the "'solid ones'" (6.24) they pretended to be.

This long opening outburst does not express Caponsacchi's "first wild sorrow and fierce indignation" at what has happened to Pompilia

(Cook 112), nor can it be said that his "contempt and anger" here are anything other than "signs of mere vindictiveness" (Yetman 20). Far from having escaped "careless egoism" (Dowden 182) to the point of expressing "relatively few of his own grievances" (Yetman 21), Caponsacchi feels so aggrieved that he cannot turn his attention to Guido's crime until he has complained of his own "jocular piece of punishment" and has reiterated his disgust with the judge who "tittered most" during his testimony at the adultery trial (6.30, 34).

Caponsacchi's rage at the judges becomes both self-vindicating and vengeful as he restates "the intelligence" (6.33) they have given him:

> . . . she I helped eight months since to escape
> Her husband, was retaken by the same,
> Three days ago . . .
> (I being disallowed to interfere,
> Meddle or make in a matter none of mine,
> For you and law were guardians quite enough
> O' the innocent, without a pert priest's help)--
> And . . . he has butchered her accordingly,
> As she foretold and as myself believed,--
> And, so foretelling and believing so,
> We were punished, both of us, the merry way. . . .
> (6.35-45)

The self-vindicating focus of this account is of course evident: he "helped" Pompilia "to escape" (6.35) and then not only was prevented from continuing to protect her, but also was "punished" for "believing" (6.44-45) Guido would murder her. What he did was right, and what he would have done, had he not been "disallowed to interfere" (6.38), would have been right, too. He shows no awareness that his rescue efforts were not completely successful, no inkling that they contributed to Guido's vengefulness, no doubt that he would have protected Pompilia from Guido. If he could hold on to this view of

himself throughout his testimony, in face of all the details of his story, his idealized self would be in far less jeopardy.

Less obvious but equally important are the vengeful elements of the account: the judges kept him from protecting Pompilia, and having made themselves "and law" her "guardians," allowed her to be "butchered . . . accordingly" (6.40, 42). The judges are thus responsible for Guido's crime, not just because they failed as "guardians," but because in some obscure way they set up Pompilia as the victim and Guido acted "accordingly" (6.42). Her "innocen[ce]" (6.41), while vindicating the priest, further accuses the judges. This subtly paranoid view of the judges as the criminals behind the criminal defends Caponsacchi from guilt (cf. Buckler 141) via the narcissist's "penchant for superego externalization," whereby he tends "to manipulate, argue, and fight with an external judge" rather than "to experience internal conflict with its associated guilt and depression" (Rothstein 139). Casting the judges as criminals also places them in the situation he has suffered from: being blamed, seen as sinful, regarded as failures, viewed in a way that violates their sense of themselves. He turns the screws again: "Pompilia is only dying while I speak! / Why does the mirth hang fire and miss the smile?" (6.47-48).

This devastating reproach seems to mark Caponsacchi's first moment of escape from his preoccupation with the past, his first direct recognition of the present reality that "Pompilia is . . . dying" (6.47) and will soon be dead. Glorification of his past rescue attempt will not give him an idealized role to play in a future from which she will be absent. She will not provide the audience he needs for such a

role--people like the judges will; and he must begin to adjust to the new situation. It seems that Caponsacchi has unconsciously evaluated his position in this way as he shifts from the tone of an Old Testament prophet (hurling verbal thunderbolts at his auditors) and slightly toward that of a New Testament, Christ-like teacher whose purpose, as Yetman says, is less "to chide" than "to instruct" them about the "spiritual values" he has derived from his experience (20).

Of course his genuine sadness at Pompilia's plight contributes to the shift, but the expansive thrust of his teaching suggests that her coming death is for him, at this point, less an occasion for self-forgetfulness than an occasion for exhibition of his superior devotion to Christianity. Addressing the judges now as "My masters," he suggests they read an "applicable" story from "an old book": the story of "a multitude of worthy folk" who "Took recreation" (6.49-53) by

> watch[ing] a certain group
> Of soldiery intent upon a game,--
> How first they wrangled, but soon fell to play,
> Threw dice,--the best diversion in the world.
> A word in your ear,--they are now casting lots,
> Ay, with that gesture quaint and cry uncouth,
> For the coat of One murdered an hour ago!
> I am a priest,--talk of what I have learned.
> (6.53-60)

Despite his humble mode of address, Caponsacchi here takes on the role of a spiritual adviser, telling the judges a Bible story as though they probably forgot the "old book" (6.49) long ago. He thus rises above them in a rebellion they cannot fault because the values he cites are officially theirs, too.

The judges are connected by implication with the sightseers and soldiers, blind and empty-souled, in the presence of the crucified

Christ, who is Pompilia. The judges have gambled away Pompilia's life, and are playing a game now, with the current court proceedings functioning as a "diversion" (6.56) from her crucifixion. Only Caponsacchi has been and is serious; only he has "learned" (6.60) what the others should have learned, too. He glorifies Pompilia, and in the process, of course, glorifies his service to her: while all others desert this Christ, turning to a degrading pastime, he stands up publicly as the one faithful disciple--the one true priest--and the one witness as she "bleed[s] out her life" (6.61).

As faithful disciple, true priest, and privileged witness, Caponsacchi bends down to the judges (who are "sobered now") and inquires loftily "what . . . [they] ask / By way of explanation" beyond "the fact" that Pompilia is dying (6.64-65). That in itself, he says, "seems to fill the universe with sight / And sound,--from the four corners of this earth / Tells itself over, to my sense at least"; the judges, however, "may want it lower set i' the scale," for it may be "Too vast, too close" for them "to comprehend" (6.66-71). His prophetic vision of an event of universal significance places him far above ordinary mortals, but, realizing their limitations, their need for help, he stoops to be "the hollow rock," to "interpret [for them] / The mystery of this murder" (6.72-74). Yet he regrets the necessity the audience puts him under to "condense / The voice o' the sea and wind" in this way: "It is too paltry, such a transference / O' the storm's roar to the cranny of the stone!" (6.72-73, 75-76).

Though he apparently wishes to mend his fences with his audience, Caponsacchi does not wish to speak without reminding them that he is

descending from the mountaintop to do so. By casting himself as the oracle, the channel through whom God's voice descends to them, he magnifies the significance of the story he is about to tell; glorifies Pompilia, whose death occasions a "storm's roar" (6.76) just as Christ's did; and continues to shape an idealized role for himself through which he can both raise himself above the judges and make them grateful for the privilege of giving him their humble approval. This step toward a revised narcissistic idealized image aims at reconciling his need to preside over the occasion as a transcendent being and his need not to transcend so completely as to alienate his potential worshippers. The pressure of this second need manifests itself also in his temporarily less abusive tone, which seems to reflect a step toward a degree of detachment from the narcissistic rage that might destroy if not his auditors, at least his hopes of gaining their approval.

Caponsacchi's more distant oracular stance begins to change, however, almost as soon as he begins actually to "interpret . . . / The mystery" (6.73-74), for moving into the concrete realm of the escape, trial, and murders once again arouses his rage at the judges:

> This deed, you saw begin--why does its end
> Surprise you? Why should the event enforce
> The lesson, we ourselves learned, she and I,
> From the first o' the fact, and taught you,
> all in vain?
> This Guido from whose throat you took my grasp,
> Was this man to be favoured, now, or feared,
> Let do his will, or have his will restrained,
> In the relation with Pompilia? Say! (6.77-84)

The series of rhetorical questions followed by the imperious "Say!" reveals that Caponsacchi's drive for vindication has overwhelmed his promised interpretation; the judges <u>must</u> acknowledge their stupid

mistakes, must agree that Caponsacchi and Pompilia, having made the situation clear, did all they could.

The connection between the priest's anger and his need to escape the threat of self-hate by externalizing it is especially evident in his demand for the judges' acquiescence to his formulation that they "took" Guido's "throat" out of his "grasp" (6.81), thus preventing him from doing what needed to be done. Only much later will he have to recognize that he had his chance at throttling Guido before the judges ever became involved in the case. At this point he paints himself as the one who "interpose[d]," who was indeed "bound [to] brave the peril, save the doomed"; the judges ordered him to remove himself from the scene, and because he "gave place / To [them]," "let the law reign paramount," and "left Pompilia to [their] watch and ward," she is dying (6.85, 89-104). He did his duty, as he was obligated to do, as a true hero would always do; his only mistake, caused solely by his moral conscientiousness, was to step aside for the court. They "let the victim die" (6.91). Thus powerlessness and ineffectiveness are the qualities not of the rescuer-priest, but of the judges.

Caponsacchi has at this point reasserted his status as the potent, saintly hero--has done so to his own satisfaction, at least--and is once more (for the time being) the superior being who surpasses their control and has no need for their approval. He addresses them not as "Sirs" (6.1) or "My masters" (6.49), but as "Men," and impatiently asks, "what do you want with me?" (6.105). They may now "acknowledge . . . a use, / A profit in employing" him to "help the august law"; they may leave him "free to break the blow, next hawk that swoops / On

next dove" and not "miss much of good repute"; they may even expect that "releas[ing]" him from exile will set everything right, leaving nothing "more [he] need concern [himself] with" in the present case (6.106-15). But they cannot manipulate him with these concessions because he does not need and indeed has contempt for the "good repute" they can confer: "Thank you! I am rehabilitated then, / A very reputable priest" (6.116-17).

Nor can they make a deal with him that will buy out his "concern" with what they have done to Pompilia; after all, "How does lenity to me, / Remit one death-bed pang to her?" he asks (6.126-27). His saintly hero-self now directs attention to the idealized Pompilia, whose attributes he glorifies in phrases reminiscent of a litany to the Blessed Virgin: "The glory of life, the beauty of the world, / The splendour of heaven" (6.118-19). The judges may wish to sweep aside her significance, but through his superior spiritual insight as a "priest . . . trained to live [his] whole life long / On beauty and splendour, solely at their source, / God," he has "recognized [his] food in her" (6.122-24). Her sacramental quality as his spiritual "food" again casts Pompilia as Christ, further glorifying Caponsacchi's service to her and further differentiating his veneration of her from a "mundane love that's sin and scandal too"--the love of "the hot-headed youth" the judges have misjudged him to be (6.130, 128).

They "are all struck acquiescent now, it seems" (6.131), and Caponsacchi, whose self-idealization paints him as far above dependence on their limited comprehension, now demonstrates his actual need to display his vindicated hero-self in the newly won territory of their

tacit approval: now each of the judges apparently "understands how law might take / Service like [his], of brain and heart and hand, / In good part" (6.134-36). He further exhibits his pride in his service by casting them as the "law" (6.136) of the Old Testament, while he connects himself again, this time overtly, to the "gospel" and suggests that it was "worthy [of] Christ, / That [he] endeavoured to save Pompilia . . ." (6.139-40).

With his hurt pride salved and his rage lessened by the judges' "acquiescent" (6.131) attitude, Caponsacchi has arrived again at the fact that he did not save Pompilia, but "endeavoured to save" her (6.131, 140). As his idealized hero-self faces once more that limitation, that barrier to its full actualization, his tone swings once more, but more strongly, toward that of the Christ-like teacher, the one faithful disciple, whose contemplation of Pompilia's crucifixion humbles him (conspicuously, of course, for his compliant traits are narcissistically exhibited) into saintly condescension to his auditors. His tendency toward narcissistic merger with Pompilia draws him toward fantasies of reaching glory through a voluntary repetition of her martyrdom, with the judges as witnesses. In the new tone aimed at reconciling the judges to his humble perfection, Caponsacchi first gathers them together, with himself in their midst, to forgive them their former blindness and to teach them:

> You were wrong, you see: that's well to see,
> though late:
> That's all we may expect of man, this side
> The grave: his good is--knowing he is bad:
> Thus will it be with us when the books ope
> As we stand at the bar on judgment-day. (6.142-46)

The tinge of resignation in the priest's tone--"That's all we may expect of man"--and his message of imperfectibility give him the air of one speaking from the cross (Father, forgive them . . .). Indeed he assumes a role that is quite similar to that one, a role marking his return to the alternate dream of glory which we have seen surfacing before in slightly different versions: in his brief, fearful attraction to a "'rigid reading'" of his vow (6.278); in the ideal of devotional sacrifice which he embraced before finally rescuing Pompilia; and in the vision of the dead martyrs which he had during the flight. This time the dream takes shape in the role of the teacher-prophet who will "speak" and thus "burn [his] soul out in showing [the judges] the truth" (6.147, 149). He will "use the very snuff / O' the taper"--his own life--"in one last spark [that] shall show truth / For a moment, show Pompilia who was true" (6.170-72). Thus consuming himself to be the light of the world, he teaches "What is priest's-duty" "in such a case" as Pompilia's: "he is bound, better or worse, to act" (6.151, 153, 159). This teaching corrects the judges' concern for routine duties conventionally performed (6.151-52, 156-58) and justifies his attempt to rescue Pompilia as having been his duty whether or not he succeeded.

The teacher-prophet ideal thus defends Caponsacchi against feeling like a failure by shifting the focus of his self-idealization from the actual outcome of his act to his having attempted it. His further shift from an emphasis on teaching to an emphasis on prophesying defends him by invoking a vision of a future in which the judges "and the others like [them] sure to come" will continually encounter

"wickedness / That wants withstanding," will intervene, and will be made to suffer because the "man of blood" and "guile" whose evil plans have been disrupted will "clamour" for judges to "redress his grievance" at having had someone prevent him from killing his "prey" (6.161-67). At these times, Caponsacchi implies, his own example will provide the guidance the world needs.

As for himself, Caponsacchi says, "My part / Is done; i' the doing it, I pass away out of the world. I want no more with earth" (6.167-69). The priest's long, lofty view not only detaches him from others (who may not appreciate him), from the pain of his actual situation of bereavement and isolation, and from a future that holds nothing for him; it also minimizes his failure by showing it to be a part of a grand, near-mythic historical pattern, participation in which is the tragic lot of all great heroes, and it further associates him (not Pompilia) with the dying Christ, Whose "It is finished" is echoed in Caponsacchi's "My part / Is done . . ." (6.167-68). Thus he adds to his teacher-prophet idealized image a crown of martyrdom.

In this emergent idealized self, multiple functions are fulfilled by Caponsacchi's notion that through his speech he will somehow be dying for Pompilia and for poor, blind humanity as represented by the judges. He is seeking martyrdom through speech for several reasons. First, to sacrifice himself in vindicating Pompilia would save her from misinterpretation and slander; Caponsacchi, extending his morbid sensitivity to others' opinions to include his idealized self-object, is intent upon having everyone "stay thought from smirching her / The snow-white soul that angels fear to take / Untenderly" (6.194-96).

Second, the kind of martyrdom he fantasizes--death by fire--suggests that he aims at attaining purification, specifically purgation of his guilt at having failed to save her life; it also suggests that he is drawn to suttee as an expression of his grief. Third, he said at the beginning of the flight that he would "'pay'" for any consequences of the rescue (6.1148), but so far Pompilia has paid far more than he has; for him to die would appease his perfectionistic need to honor his obligation and balance his psychological books. Fourth, since he believes that understanding Pompilia's truth will save his hearers by making her their efficacious intercessor once she is a saint in heaven (6.172-78), his sacrificing the "last spark" (6.170-71) of his life to give them this understanding will make him their savior; and saving his audience would prove to them once and for all that he is a good, true priest if not a veritable Christ--that he is his idealized self.

A further result of his death would be the preservation of his idealized self at the height of its perfection. It would escape the gnawing, tarnishing effects of the rest of his life, which would inevitably be all anticlimax. Finally, his martyrdom would make him, like Pompilia, a saint worthy not only of veneration, but also of actual participation in the blissful state of regressive narcissistic merger that he fantasized in his vision of the two martyrs. To recapture that state and experience it forever is his idea of heaven, and Guido's foreclosure of possible recovery of that heaven on earth inclines him toward a search for glory that would end in his "pass[ing] away / Out of the world" (6.168-69).

Feeling his way into his teacher-prophet-martyr role, which has built into it the requirement for students, hearers, and witnesses, Caponsacchi shows an increasing concern for his audience's reactions, a concern that leads him into a new stance, another shift of tone. Having extolled the saintly power Pompilia will have "to do us good, / . . . in heaven," he generously hopes that "her first prayer" will be for the judges, since already "She has done the good to" him (6.175-76, 178-79). Eager to deny that what he has said means he "loved" Pompilia "In the way [Guido] called love" (6.184-85), he tumbles over himself to refute that interpretation. He reminds them that Guido is not only a "murderer" but also a "fool" to suspect Caponsacchi of such a "taint," which the priest would surely have hidden instead of speaking for Pompilia openly (6.184-89). He reinforces his point by comparing his speech to a vicarious deathbed confession: he could not "Lie" "i' the face of . . . her death / That's in [his] eyes and ears and brain and heart" (6.191-93). He elevates Pompilia's "snow-white soul" and sets only a bit below it his own "taintless" one, which he offers to "bare" for them as proof that his love is pure (6.195-97).

Finally he does "bare [his] breast," articulating his half-suppressed softer feelings in the context of yet another appeal to his auditors for their correct interpretation of him:

> . . . to hear thus suddenly such an end
> Of such a wonderful white soul, that comes
> Of a man and murderer calling the white black,
> Must shake me, trouble and disadvantage. Sirs,
> Only seventeen! (6.199-203)

The feelings now welling up in Caponsacchi have come, I suspect, through the channel created by his narcissistic union with Pompilia.

Just as his empathy with her fear of Guido made him afraid, too, so his current tendency to merge with her--he feels her death in him--makes him feel weak and helpless; these feelings in turn increase his need for an idealized audience to strengthen him. As a result, he is pulled between his need to play his exhibitionistic role of teacher-prophet-martyr and a need to throw himself at his audience's feet and beg for the comfort of confirmation.

His conflicting impulses put Caponsacchi under great pressure to strike a balance in his relationship to the audience. His attempt to do so is evident in his preface to his life story. He begins by attributing to the judges, whom he has called "Sirs" again, a far more benevolent and insightful nature than he has previously conceded: "Why, good and wise you are! / You might at the beginning stop my mouth: / So, none would be to speak for her, that knew" (6.202, 204-06). Thus he creates an image of them as people who will provide the help, guidance, and protection that his idealizing side desires; who will understand and appreciate the goodness and wisdom of his narcissistic idealized self; and who will be capable of receiving the gospel that he, the privileged disciple, will preach to them. "I talk impertinently," he admits, "and you bear, / All the same" (6.207-08). Having confessed a fault, he patronizingly congratulates them for according him the tolerance he deserves: "This it is to have to do / With honest hearts: they easily may err, / But in the main they wish well to the truth" (6.208-10).

The judges are doing the best they can, he suspects, and so he weaves together his self-comforting (idealizing) and his vindictive and

patronizing attitudes toward them in an attempt to integrate his conflicting impulses. They "are Christians," therefore benevolent; but they exemplify the kind of person who "pluck[s] / A rag . . . from the body of the Lord, / To wear and mock with," so they are still, at the same time, the callous, blind, inferior soldiers casting lots for Christ's coat. Still, their sort "look[s] the greater and [is] the better" for those shreds of Christianity and so by implication is not a hopeless case (6.211-14). Thus Caponsacchi pulls himself together and in the process makes the judges into an audience for whom he can hope to act his role effectively: basically good, teachable, but inferior people who can listen and learn to give him the admiration he deserves. Before them, he can "go on now"; and if Pompilia "need[s]" for him to "keep calm," then, he says, "Calm I'll keep as monk that croons / Transcribing battle, earthquake, famine, plague, / From parchment to his cloister's chronicle" (6.215-18).

Thus, for the moment at least, Caponsacchi reconciles and withdraws from his conflict, imaging the resignation he needs as a monk who experiences disaster at a double remove from its intense, painful reality. The "parchment" (6.218) is already once removed from the reported events, and the act of transcribing within the cloister, which is separated even from the world where eye-witness reports are written, removes the monk a second step from any disturbance that would disrupt the lullaby he sings to himself. From this detached stance, precariously established, Caponsacchi "begin[s]" (6.220).

II

Caponsacchi's narrative repeatedly threatens his calming detachment. His first characterization of himself to the judges--"I am one of your body and a priest" (6.221)--indicates a continued interest in presenting himself as their teacher-colleague, but as soon as he begins to discuss his family background, his narcissistic pride in his superiority (especially superiority to Guido) begins to dominate him again. His memories of his scruples about taking his vow and of his bishop's advice that he take it in "'an easier sense'" (6.276) begin to focus on self-vindication: it was the bishop who suggested that he become a society priest, the bishop who ordered Caponsacchi to "'obey'" his "prescription" (6.330, 343) and do the secular things that later made the judges doubt his purity in relation to Pompilia. Besides shifting the responsibility for his questionable behavior onto others, the priest details the political tutoring and worldly prospects offered him by the bishop to show the judges--<u>in</u>directly--what a pleasurable and easy career would have been his if he had not undertaken the difficult rescue project.

Thus Caponsacchi's sense of his superiority and nobility is stirring by the time he describes his first sight of Pompilia, his resulting discontent with the shallow life to which the bishop (that bad influence) chidingly holds him (6.468-73), and his exchange of letters with Guido-as-Pompilia. Once he has picked over the history of the correspondence, reliving the process that multiplied his expansive desire to triumph over Guido, his expansive side has become quite aroused, as it was at the beginning of the monologue. When he

remembers "reach[ing] this point / O' the narrative" at the first trial--the "point" when he decided to go to Guido's palace and take on the plotters he believed would be waiting to trap him--he also remembers a skeptical question a judge asked then, and his resurrected rage at what Guido had been doing spills over to and resurrects his anger at the question that injured his pride at the first trial.

All this old anger, combined with his barely suppressed fury at what Guido has done now, overcomes his detachment; and his tone shifts radically. "You of the Court!" he exclaims combatively: look back at the "notes" (6.659, 661) from the first trial, he orders,

> and see and say
> If someone did not interpose with smile
> And sneer, "And prithee why so confident
> "That the husband must, of all needs, not the wife,
> "Fabricate thus,--what if the lady loved?
> "What if she wrote the letters?" (6.661-66)

His answer now, though ostensibly a reply to Guido's accusation as relayed by the judges at the first trial, also vents his hostility toward the judges, who found the accusation credible, and toward Guido as the murderer of Pompilia. It could no more be true that she wrote the letters than it would be true "if a low-browed verger" in the church with the Raphael madonna exhibited a "scorpion" and claimed that it came from the mouth of the pictured Virgin (6.669-73). The truth would be that the verger's "'soul'" had produced the nasty thing "'By way of the ordure-corner!'" (6.674-76). Though Caponsacchi seems to be speaking only of Guido's letters when he refers to "the same long black teasing lie / Obtruded . . . at every turn" and only of Guido's filth when he says "the pest / Was far too near the picture, anyhow," his shift to the plural number implies that his analogies include a half-

suppressed reference to the judges, too, whose lewd suspicions he feels he must still attack for Pompilia's sake: "One does Madonna service, making clowns / Remove their dung-heap from the sacristy" (6.678-82).

The relish with which Caponsacchi recounts his plan to turn Guido's "'ambush'" into humiliating defeat and especially the energy with which he repeats his intention to spit in Guido's face (6.687, 700) suggest that his re-experienced past vindictiveness has further aroused and has become the vehicle for his present desire to take revenge on Guido. The priest's increasingly arrogant-vindictive stance undergoes a sudden shift, however, when Pompilia appears on the narrative scene: she stilled his violence at the time of the event, and Caponsacchi's tone evidences that remembering her stunning appearance has the same effect.

Focused on reconstructing Pompilia's long speech and their agreement on a second meeting, Caponsacchi seems able to maintain a degree of detachment; but his equanimity is threatened again when he reaches another point in the story where, during the first trial, a judge interrupted with an unacceptable question: even if Guido actually wrote the letters, was not their "'spirit'" hers? Did not Guido simply realize her intent and "'G[i]ve . . . expression'" to the same things she later said and did (6.896-908)? The judge insisted on "'the unforged fact--she sent for [Caponsacchi], / 'Spontaneously elected [him] to help, / '--What men call, loved [him] . . .'" (6.903-05). Caponsacchi cannot abide any such comparison of Pompilia's feelings with those of ordinary people, any more than he can abide having his own feelings seen as similar to others'. He therefore

returns to his "first simile" of the scorpion (6.909-11), insisting that the "lying tale" (again, the judges are implicated as well as Guido) would not be confirmed, but rather refuted, if the "Pictured Madonna" later "raised her painted hand, / Fixed the face Rafael bent above the Babe, / On my face as I flung me at her feet . . ." (6.912-17). This kind of supraordinary experience, he maintains, was his: "my miracle" (6.919).

It is important to understand Caponsacchi's intense determination here to demolish any implication that Pompilia's love for him, or his for her, even slightly resembled ordinary human love. Of course he still cannot refrain from rehashing any point the judges previously questioned, since his drive for vindication remains strong. His denial of a fleshly attraction to Pompilia is easily understandable in the light of this drive and in the light of his need to set himself and his motives far above such earthly associations: purity is part and parcel of his idealized image, and far from "accepting . . . [the] normal desires of his human nature" (Boo 185), he must banish any awareness of their existence. At this point he is not just suppressing his own possible guilt; he is also denying that Pompilia could have needed him, in any ordinary sense of the word "need." This position appears peculiar, since his self-justification rests heavily on the peril of her situation before the rescue, his account of her plea has just emphasized her own recognition of her need, and his pride in his action stems in part from the very sense of having been "'elected'" that the judge has mentioned (6.904). Caponsacchi's eagerness to separate Pompilia's needs and feelings from those of mere human beings

must therefore be interpreted as a sign of some impulse or fantasy that runs counter to the logic of the case he is making on the surface.

The priest's comparison of Pompilia's call to a "miracle vouchsafed and manifest" (6.916) is I think the key to this underlying fantasy. His logical/theological justification for the rescue posits that his Christian duty was to intervene on behalf of the weak, helpless person who appealed to him for protection. This notion of Christian duty seems to me consistent with the gospel teachings upon which Caponsacchi bases it. Those teachings do not specify, however, that it is one's Christian duty to help weak, endangered people only if they are in addition morally and spiritually pure, any more than they contain convenient provisos that Christians should feed and clothe the deserving poor, visit prisoners who were framed, and care for the sick whose diseases are not sexually transmitted. Jesus said that an act of mercy "done . . . unto one of the least of these my brethren" is "done . . . unto me" (Matthew 25: 40), which means that one should help even if the person helped is really "the least."

Caponsacchi, by contrast, apparently assumes that his rescue of Pompilia can only be justified if she was really the most. This is one of the strongest reasons for believing that his underlying notion of his duty is tied up with his search for glory--specifically, that his "Christian act" was powerfully, if obscurely, motivated by a fantasy version of the teaching: a fantasy that a good deed to "one of the least of" one's fellow humans is done to Jesus Himself.

The fantasy is a common enough one. In it, the good Christian helps someone who <u>appears</u> to be among the least--and that someone turns

out really to be Christ. In a typical example, Saint Christopher, tired out after a long day of carrying travellers across the river on his back, almost refuses to make one last crossing with a pitiful little boy, but does decide to do it after all; as he crosses, the child gets heavier and heavier; when at last he deposits his passenger and looks at him, he sees that the child has turned into Christ. By insisting upon Pompilia's suprahuman perfection, Caponsacchi creates a similar legend. He makes himself out to be not simply the good Christian who helped his fellow human being, but the privileged one who helped the Blessed Virgin herself. His rescue mission thus appears to him more glorious, his merit more exceptional, his and Pompilia's detractors more despicable--and his argument based on Pompilia's weakness rather absurd, given his association of her with omnipotence.

The further psychological significance of his fantasy of Pompilia's omnipotence becomes clear when the miracle of the moving picture is analyzed. In that "simile" (6.909) the Virgin transfers her attentive gaze from her own son, the infant Christ, to Caponsacchi. And she "raise[s] her painted hand," apparently in special recognition and blessing, as he throws himself "at her feet" (6.913, 915). The figure of speech I take to be a transformation of something that is pressing toward the surface in Caponsacchi: a resurgence of his regressive narcissistic experience of Pompilia as the idealized self-object whose omnipotence he wishes now to recapture as his own, and before whom he wishes once again to exhibit and gain confirmation of his grandiose self. The possibility of holding on to this relationship to Pompilia is threatened by the judges' reservations

about her perfection, which bring the pressure of reality to bear upon his fragile dream of bliss. That is one more reason for his defensive analogy making--and for his rapid immersion of his momentary anger, which accentuates his separation from bliss, in the veritable warm bath of ecstatic language that conjures up, more for his own sake than for the judges', the "invasion" he underwent following the meeting with Pompilia (6.947). Impelled by his renewed desire for narcissistic union with her, he sweeps aside his disquieting memory of and anger at the judge's questioning, in very much the same way that, in the aftermath of the meeting, he "gave a passing glance" to his realization of the extent of Guido's plot but "'Let the wraith go to nothingness again'" so as to "'have only thought for'" Pompilia (6.922, 935-36).

Arriving at the moment when he jumped into the carriage with Pompilia, Caponsacchi is confronted with the remembered reality of their narcissistic union, which now can be only a dream, and of the "last dreadful dawn" that ended it (6.1154). Faced with the painful prospect of verbally reconstructing the lost union, the priest longs to escape from his mental anguish while actualizing his latest idealized self, the teacher-prophet-martyr. He longs to "wring, drop by drop, / [His] brain dry, make a riddance of the drench / Of minutes with a memory in each," but he envisions this escape from consciousness as a fulfillment of the teacher-prophet aspect of his role, since it will create for his audience "one pure glass" to "Mirror [them] plain" the example they need to follow, that of "the perfect soul Pompilia"; he will then die and "lie quiet in [his] grave," having become a martyr as well (6.1155-62).

He feels "drunk with truth / Stagnant inside him"--he means, I think, that he is unable to attain psychological equilibrium because his memories arouse so much inner turmoil; nor can he "be calm" knowing that "they've killed her, Sirs!" (6.1163-65). Yet he exhorts himself, "Calmly!" (6.1166). He must show how "Each incident / Proves . . . that action of the flight / For the true thing it was" (6.1166-68) not only to defend Pompilia, but also to quiet his expansive trends (which will allow him no peace until he feels he has vindicated himself and received confirmation) and to fulfill his last mission as idealized teacher-prophet-martyr.

The narrative of the flight does seem to calm Caponsacchi as he reenters the memory of his transference relationship with Pompilia; yet disturbing elements inevitably emerge. Telling of his choice to let Pompilia rest all night at Castelnuovo--or rather of his inability to make a choice--threatens the priest with self-blame. The strong possibility is that he could have prevented their being overtaken by Guido. Much worse, however, is the memory of Guido's long, taunting speech, throughout which, Caponsacchi admits to the judges,

> I stood as near
> The throat of him,--with these two hands, my own,--
> As now I stand near yours, Sir,--one quick spring,
> One great good satisfying gripe, and lo!
> There had he lain abolished with his lie,
> Creation purged o' the miscreate, man redeemed,
> A spittle wiped from off the face of God! (6.1473-79)

Caponsacchi's sense of his omission as failure is very keen here. Buckler catches the importance of this inaction by saying that it is "the exemplary event by which he will ever after recognize the difference between what he is and what he is not" (153).

The passage also exemplifies the narcissistic distortion inherent in the standard by which Caponsacchi judges himself to have failed. Though hindsight obviously suggests that Pompilia would have been saved if he had killed Guido at the inn, it is by no means obvious that Caponsacchi should have done so. According to the priest's own account, Guido had a sword, but never drew it (though Pompilia did) or threatened physical violence either to the priest or to his wife. He did lie to the local authorities and did urge them to arrest the pair. For Caponsacchi to have killed Guido under these conditions would surely have been unjustifiable, from any reasonable point of view; his not doing so was not a sin of omission. Caponsacchi's self-reproach "For what [he] left undone" (6.1481) is based on the assumptions that he had both infallible insight into the "miscreate" (6.1478) Guido's being and special status as God's helper, and that these things would have made it right for him to kill Guido.

The priest feels like such a failure, then, because he feels his exceptional status entitled him to dispose of Guido; thus his version of his failure covertly confirms his superiority. So does his "poor excuse" for the failure--that Guido's "lie" struck him as too "ludicrous" for anyone to credit it (6.1480, 1486). Under this interpretation, much responsibility for the outcome is shifted to others, who lacked Caponsacchi's superior insight.

The fact that he did not kill Guido remains, of course: "while [he] mused, / The minute, oh the misery, was gone!" (6.1498-99); and Caponsacchi's bitterness at having lost his opportunity remains profoundly disturbing, even though he has found ways to preserve some

of his narcissistic sense of superiority by interpreting his inaction in the way he does and also because he has found these ways of keeping alive in himself the expansive impulses that interfere with his escaping his pain by cultivating detachment. That the priest is having to reexamine his inaction now, when the news of the crime has multiplied his desire for revenge against Guido, simply adds to his sense of failure and to the strength of his expansive trends, so that his inner conflict is kept alive and active.

Caponsacchi's narration of the events between his arrest in the inn yard and his successful demand for a trial in Rome manages to contain his self-hate and vengefulness up to the point when "Pompilia's face . . . looked on [him] / The last time in this life"; his loss--conceived narcissistically as loss of mutual gazing--then hits him with painful clarity: "not one sight since, / Never another sight to be!" (6.1588-90). His self-hate and his anger begin to take precedence over the narrative once more: "And yet / I thought I had saved her. I appealed to Rome: / It seems I simply sent her to her death" (6.1590-92). Here Caponsacchi reproaches both the judges and himself (Wilt 350), but his self-accusation shifts blame toward the judges. His mistake--explicable in terms of his idealistic view of the church--was to trust the judges, its representatives, to do the right thing by continuing his rescue project. Reinforcing this externalization of self-hate are his implication that the judges executed Pompilia (he "sent her to her death" [6.1592] by sending her before them) and his irrational speculation that they have fabricated the story of the

murders to "torture" him--"an honest wile," he tells them ironically, that "'Twere worthy you" (6.1592, 1594-98).

His self-exonerating suspicion of the judges and his need for the idealized Pompilia combine to trigger a fantasy denying that she can be dead. "I cannot have the lady dead!" he exclaims; her "erect form, flashing brow, fulgurant eye," and "voice immortal," as he remembers them in the moments when she brandished Guido's own sword, cannot be gone: "that was not the last / O' the lady!" (6.1599-1605). Besides, she "herself said / I had saved her: do you dare say she spoke false?" (6.1606-007), he adds. Voicing his idealization of Pompilia as a being whose words must constitute a divine decree seems to weaken the fantasy, exposing its irrationality; Caponsacchi plunges back into the world of possibility: "Let me see for myself if it be so!" (6.1608).

The priest needs to find a way to preserve the wonderful effects of Pompilia's confirmation (cf. Wilt 352) when he can no longer preserve his sense of the confirmation as a magic guarantee that what she said was infallible--a difficult task, since for the narcissist, confirmation <u>is</u> magic, in the psychic realm. To see her, he believes, might make his task possible. To see her again and "be of use" to her by doing his "duty" as "a priest" would allow him to hold onto and to get confirmation of some ideal of himself (6.1609-12), for to confess and absolve a dying person is in a sense to stand in for Christ as the person's savior; and Pompilia might directly reaffirm his savior status. In addition, the judges' allowing him to see Pompilia would indicate that in their eyes he is "established, proved a priest," that his behavior toward Pompilia was so pure that even when he "touched

her" once--carrying her into the inn--the act was not just "harmlessly done," but sacramental in its significance: he did it "As we priests carry the paten . . ." (6.1613, 1616-20).

At the thought of re-experiencing that awesome Christ-Pompilia equation, Caponsacchi is momentarily appeasing toward the judges, for through them he might recapture his privileged position; indeed he says that he has come before them only "to get leave and go see her" (6.1621). But his return to a defiant, superior stance casts doubt on that simple analysis of his motivation: "I might lock lips, / Laugh at your jurisdiction: what have you / To do with me in the matter?" (6.1623-25). His scornful expansive side is again as active as it was in the beginning as he points out that he had no "hand in the new crime"; he "was chained fast at Civita hand and foot," thanks to the judges; there was nothing he could have done; they and "Rome and the Church" were responsible for Pompilia's safety "Two days ago, when Guido . . . / Hacked her to pieces" (6.1627-33). "One might well be wroth," he continues, with a cold fury that belies his claim to have come before the court "for pure friendship's sake" (6.1633, 1636).

Certainly he decides to go on to tell his "tale to the end" for another reason: "not [to] leave [the judges] that excuse!" (6.1637-38). Perhaps he consciously means by this only that they will have no reason to refuse his request to see Pompilia; yet what has come just before this suggests that his drive for vindication, fueled by the vindictiveness that is the externalization of his self-hate, compels him to blame the judges for everything that has gone wrong, to blame them so relentlessly and so thoroughly that they will feel they are

really to blame for everything and have no excuse for any of it. Having so brutally stated the results of his and the judges' mistakes and Guido's crime--Pompilia has been "hacked . . . to pieces" (6.1633)--Caponsacchi is determined to exonerate himself and heap guilt on his auditors in a manner just as brutally effective. In this mood he zealously dissects the first trial: if he does not "vary now" from what he said then (6.1644-45), what has since happened is their fault. If the evidence they weighed against him and Pompilia was "stupid" (6.1651) and if their logic was as corrupt as their moral vision, then he is innocent and the judges almost as guilty as Guido.

III

Caponsacchi's account of the first trial exhausts the events of his story, but not his need to place himself in a category with one other person--Pompilia--and to set that category of perfection in the most dramatic possible contrast with the category containing everyone else, especially the judges and Guido. He therefore circles back over the story, this time heightening oppositions and making strong distinctions to appease his rage for separation of himself, Pompilia, and their actions from all imperfection, "Even [in the] most ambiguous circumstance" (6.1822). If, as Shaw remarks, Browning has given The Ring "a ponderously formal, severely symmetrical design that turns the whole into a heavy myth, a kind of overgrown morality play" (236; cf. Buckler 5), then Caponsacchi's review of his story illustrates a similar construction of significance, a personal mythification of events and characters in accordance with his psychological needs.

He begins with the "thunder" and "whirlwind" of the judges' summoning him to Rome, images suggesting the universal chaos from which a mythic structure must be formed. The supposed order imposed when the judges "dealt out law adroitly" (6.1763) has disintegrated:

> . . . those scales,
> I meekly bowed to, took my allotment from,
> Guido has snatched at, broken in your hands,
> Metes to himself the murder of his wife,
> Full measure, pressed down, running over now!
> (6.1763-67)

The judges have mistakenly tried to achieve justice by first assuming that Caponsacchi and Guido were each partly guilty and partly innocent, as Caponsacchi has complained (6.1730-37, 1742-43), then balancing their scales with some punishment and some leniency for each.

Uneasy at the possibility that he was too obedient, too self-effacing, when he "meekly bowed" (6.1764) to the judges' decision, the priest aggressively shows the irrelevance of the balanced-scales model for bringing order to the chaos Guido has caused. Separation of good from evil, purity from sin, must be the ordering principle; mixed qualities and middle grounds must be rejected if "an explanation" (6.1768) of the crime is to be developed. The judges must see the case not as the story of an "officious priest [who] would personate Saint George / For a mock princess in undragoned days," but as the story of a real "Princess" threatened by a real "dragon belching flame," so that there "should have been a Saint George also" to save her (6.1771-77). The mythic formulation is the true one.

Though Caponsacchi may at this point still be aware "that he was <u>not</u> that St. George" (Wilt 351), he seems to be thinking of himself more as a real Saint George figure who properly planned "to break the

[Princess's] bonds / At Arezzo, lead her by the little hand, / Till she reached Rome, and let her try to live . . ." (6.1778-80). The judges, thinking themselves "law and gospel," interfered; they made him "Stand back, allow [their] faculty elbow-room" (6.1781-82), and then failed to see that he and Pompilia were, and are, at the opposite pole from Guido. They failed to see the extreme oppositions of myth embodied in the reality they had to judge; theirs was a failure of the apocalyptic vision that separates sheep from goats, the eternally saved from the eternally damned. For this failure Caponsacchi condemns them: "You blind guides who must needs lead eyes that see! / Fools, alike ignorant of man and God!" (6.1783-84). Against their "blind," "ignorant" middle view he turns a rhetoric of apocalyptic sorting and absolute contrasts which both exposes the judges' errors and encloses Pompilia and himself in a charmed circle of incorruption.

Caponsacchi's contrastive mythification of the people and events that so inexplicably "perplexed [the judges'] wit" begins by heightening their error: their original ruling was so obviously wrong that it was "As if Saint Peter failed to recognize / Nero as no apostle, John or James"; their "owl-eyes" were so dim that "Till someone burned a martyr, made a torch / O' the blood and fat" to light Nero's face, they could not recognize him (6.1785-91). Sorting out the extreme categories that the judges confused--Nero and apostles--Caponsacchi portrays Guido as having always had a "Large-lettered" "cartulary" "like hell's masterpiece of print" displayed "On [his] head and front" (6.1792-94). Hell's ownership of Guido was written all over his face like its title deed to him; he appeared before them already

bearing the mark of the beast on his forehead, the mark that will be placed on all the other damned just before Judgment Day (Revelation 14: 9-11). Like the devil who had thus claimed him for hell, Guido wished to make Pompilia lose her soul by "plagu[ing] her into overt sin / And shame" (6.1797-98). Guido not only is, but also has always been, the visible essence of that which is to be judged deserving of hell fire.

Having thus asserted Guido's mythically absolute evil, Caponsacchi now focuses on the letters Guido forged, seeing them as the damned man's threatening projection of his evil into the vicinity of Pompilia and himself. The letters' creation of an apparent middle ground--occupied by dragon, princess, and saint alike--must be undone in order to release Pompilia and Caponsacchi into mythic opposition to Guido. Thus the priest describes Guido's letters as attempts to infect Pompilia and him with a revolting smallpox-like disease, "Touching [them] with such pustules of the soul" in hopes that they "might take the taint, be shown / To the world and shuddered over, speckled so . . ." (6.1804-06). This unbearable juxtaposition must be exploded by Caponsacchi's apocalyptic rhetoric, which presents Pompilia and him as having been divinely catapulted away from "the quagmire" of Guido's evil (6.1800) into a spectacular cosmic conjunction:

> . . . when at the last we did rush each on each,
> By no chance but because God willed it so--
> The spark of truth was struck from out our souls--
> Made all of me, descried in the first glance,
> Seem fair and honest and permissible love
> O' the good and true--as the first glance told me
> There was no duty patent in the world
> Like daring try be good and true myself,
> Leaving the show of things to the Lord of Show
> And Prince o' the Power of the Air. (6.1812-21)

Thus contrasting the judges' blindness with his and Pompilia's truth-illuminated, God-granted sight, the judges' involvement in the kingdom of appearance with his and Pompilia's participation in the kingdom of truth, Caponsacchi rhetorically sweeps away every possible "ambiguous circumstance" surrounding the "flight" (6.1821-22). Not only does he assert that Guido's allegation about the priest's having been secretly visiting Pompilia was not "true one pin-point speck"; he also claims that they did not "stop an hour, / Diverge a foot from straight road" on the way to Rome--a statement hardly consistent with the facts. He presents his appeal to Rome "At the first fall of misfortune" as retroactive proof that their escape was carried out under "the eye of Rome, / The eye of yourselves" (the judges), since he and Pompilia were trying to reach the people who were her parents in the eyes of Roman law (6.1826, 1838-43).

The intensity of Caponsacchi's drive for mythic separation from the judges, as well as Guido, is temporarily deflected by his coming once more to the memory of the trial. He still cannot transcend his need for the judges' approval of the flight, and entangles himself again in the logic-wrangling through which he tries to gain that confirmation and at the same time wrench from them an admission of their sole guilt. By "Deliver[ing] up Pompilia" to her parents, "those the flight was ventured for," the judges "Confirm[ed]" the "purpose" of the flight--that is, approved its "end"; they should have gone "One poor step more" to "justify the means" (6.1845-50). They should have said, "'Here's the exceptional conduct that should claim / 'To be exceptionally judged . . .'" (6.1851-52); and they should have ruled so

resoundingly against the devil Guido that he could not "intervene like me, / Prove one exception more . . ." (6.1853-56).

Caponsacchi's detour into special pleading with and blaming of the judges serves to reinforce his enormous claim of special status--he was (and is) the only legitimate exception--and to magnify his mythic opposition to Guido and (to some extent) the judges, who have "play[ed] into the devil's hands" (6.1853). With his claim of exceptionality and his sense of separateness so aroused, Caponsacchi casts Guido as the appropriate recipient of their judgment, but himself as so good and successful that he is above the law: "I saved his wife / Against law: against law he slays her now: / Deal with him!" (6.1856-58).

The narcissistic impulse toward transcendence, the need to soar beyond the need for confirmation, spurs the priest's identification with his mythically perfect, separate, self-sufficient idealized self:

> I have done with being judged.
> I stand here guiltless in thought, word and deed,
> To the point that I apprise you,--in contempt
> For all misapprehending ignorance
> O' the human heart, much more the mind of Christ,--
> That I assuredly did bow, was blessed
> By the revelation of Pompilia. There!
> Such is the final fact I fling you, Sirs,
> To mouth and mumble and misinterpret: there!
> (6.1859-67)

Though he is playing neither teacher, prophet, nor martyr at this moment, still Caponsacchi is not really becoming here his real self and thus attaining "an authentic independence" (Slinn 120), though he would doubtless approve this idealized view of the matter; he is fantasizing himself into freedom from the limits that an encircling audience places on his performative life. In this self-fictionalization, he escapes dependence on the audience's judgment by placing himself above

its reach; he transforms the pain of their misunderstanding of him into a token of his superiority by finding them incapable of understanding "the human heart," while he understands even "the mind of Christ" (6.1863); and he rises above them as a man who has been granted a personal revelation of perfection that will resist all their filthy snuffling when it is "fl[u]ng" before them (6.1866) as before swine.

He defends his idealized image from being dirtied by the idea that he is "'in love'" by assuming that they cannot help "hav[ing] it the vulgar way." By scornfully inviting them to "Unpriest" him, "Degrade deep, disenfranchise all [they] dare-- / Remove [him] from the midst" as no "fit companion for" them (6.1868-72), he assures himself in advance that no rejection of theirs can really hurt him, since they are not fit to be with him. His description of other priests serves both to prove their trivial status and to separate him, as his current idealized self, from the past self that resembled them:

> Your gay Abati with the well-turned leg
> And rose i' the hat-rim, Canons, cross at neck
> And silk mask in the pocket of the gown,
> Brisk Bishops with the world's musk still unbrushed
> From the rochet; I'll no more of these good things:
> There's a crack somewhere, something that's unsound
> I' the rattle! (6.1873-80)

Ascending the hierarchy to the "Brisk Bishops" (6.1876) with their life of ease and power, Caponsacchi's speech is both a final judgment that preempts the church authorities' possible judgment against him and a rejection of his birthright--his entitlement to high position in the church. This voluntary renunciation does not lessen his status, but enhances it (in his eyes, at least). Giving up his entitlement implies that <u>only</u> he could keep him from being a bishop; it frees him

from the need to win his superiors' approval, making him their superior; and it introduces into his mythical self-sufficiency an element of martyrdom. If they strip him of his priestly garments, they will not hurt him, but they will reenact the Roman soldiers' treatment of Christ (a metaphor he applied to Pompilia in the beginning), thus allowing him to reenact the image of martyrdom without its pain. Altogether, Caponsacchi seems to have created an invulnerable position: he can judge the judges, but their judgment cannot reach him, for his judgment has annihilated their power over him.

The only problem with Caponsacchi's invulnerability is that it is a fantasy--a fantasy that satisfies his need for transcendence but, as he quickly discovers, leaves him no one to confirm his achievement. Only Pompilia would be great enough to do that, and the sole means of access to her, now that she is a saint, is to "Build churches" in her honor and "go pray!" (6.1881-82). Caponsacchi is getting lonely. The impulse to win over an audience--the other pole of the narcissistic bind--has come to the fore; needing others to validate him, he invites the judges to come "find [him] there" in Pompilia's church and to pray to her with him (6.1882-83). Swinging back toward the role of Christ-like teacher--as he did before when he realized that his future audience would have to be ordinary mortals like the judges--he mirrors them to themselves as the good, sympathetic people he now needs them to be: "Why, there's a Judge weeping! Did not I say / You were good and true at bottom? You see the truth-- / I am glad I helped you: she helped me just so" (6.1884-86). His anger at the judges pacified by the feeling that he has won them over, he exhibits himself as the

saint's privileged servant, helping as he was helped, showing everyone else "the truth" (6.1884) granted him by a special revelation. At the same time, his loneliness without Pompilia and his memory of how "she helped" him (6.1886) when she was with him are again threatening him with self-hate at not having saved her from Guido, to whom he next turns his attention--only to defer briefly to the judges to "counsel" about Guido's fate (6.1887).

Caponsacchi appears to have lost his sense of transcendence as he reproaches himself for his failure:

> I bow my head, bend to the very dust,
> Break myself up in shame of faultiness.
> I had him one whole moment, as I said--
> As I remember, as will never out
> O' the thoughts of me,--I had him in arm's reach
> . . . . . .
> I could have killed him ere he killed his wife,
> And did not: he went off alive and well
> And then effected this last feat--through me!
> Me--not through you--dismiss that fear! 'Twas you
> Hindered me staying here to save her,--not
> From leaving you and going back to him
> And doing service in Arezzo. (6.1888-1900)

Though his "shame of faultiness" (6.1889) seems real enough, the priest seems to be dealing in a typically narcissistic way with his hate for the actual self that did not kill Guido. Ivimey observes that in "moments of angry despair," when the narcissist seems "carried away in extravagant and grandiloquent disgust with himself," (s)he may well be "dramatiz[ing] . . . self-hatred . . . to impress himself and others with the magnitude and violence of his rage against himself" (15). This "exhibitionistic" mode of self-hatred is intended "to . . . excite" the audience's "sympathy" while at the same time the narcissist is mainly preoccupied with "impressing" them, thus experiencing his or

her performance rather than experiencing "a direct, inner onslaught" of self-hate (Ivimey 15).

This kind of exhibitionistically exaggerated self-reproach is reflected in Caponsacchi's rhetoric of "self-abasement" (6.1902) and in his extreme conception of the duty he has not done: he should have killed Guido at the inn; but failing that, he should have left Civita, returned to Arezzo, and done "service" to Pompilia, evidently by killing Guido there. Grossly magnifying his guilt by taking on the judges' and even Guido's responsibility in the matter, Caponsacchi makes himself into a scapegoat-martyr, taking everyone's sins upon himself. He seeks the judges' admiration at and gratitude for his magnanimous removal of blame from them (a blame which of course he placed on them earlier) and presents himself as a superpriest who can grant this general absolution. He also invites the judges to react to his "irrational and unwarranted self-accusation" (Gridley, "Browning's Caponsacchi" 293) by sympathetically attending to him as the central tragic figure and totally absolving him. In short, having rebounded from the stance of total innocence that marked his narcissistic bid for transcendence of audiences, he adopts a stance of total guilt that marks his equally narcissistic bid for complete audience involvement in his point of view. The narcissism of both stances is evident: assuming oneself to be beyond the judgment of mortals and assuming oneself licensed to judge all other mortals, even to the point of engaging in preemptive strikes against the evil-hearted, both indicate narcissistic delusions of omnipotence and limitless entitlement.

The narcissistic quality of Caponsacchi's mythologizing continues to be evident in his conception of the way the judges--acting on his advice--should "deal with Guido" (6.1903). In a fantasy that has been characterized as "Dantesque" (Cook 113, 135; Altick and Loucks 55), Caponsacchi envisions the judges and the entire world as joining with him in a vindictive rejection of Guido that allows the villain to "slide out of life" (6.1911) into the lowest hell, where he becomes the companion of Judas. The fantasied punishment reflects, perhaps more fully than any other part of Caponsacchi's speech, the depth of the priest's narcissistic rage at the wound Guido has inflicted upon him. By being the "decisive" figure in the plot (Sullivan 80), Guido has not simply wrecked Caponsacchi's emulative idealized self; he has blotted the priest's fundamental sense of perfection--a blot that "will never out / O' the thoughts of" him (6.1891-92).

The ultimate source of Caponsacchi's rage--his sense of having incurred such a blot--explains the kind of punishment he wishes Guido to have. For our purpose here, we may think of narcissistic rage as resulting from a blow to the Horneyan idealized self that not only forces the victim to lose a sense of identification with that relatively particularized image of perfection, but also penetrates to the omnipotent, unlimited, perfect grandiose self (the Kohutian archaic grandiose self) from which the narcissist's idealized self has developed. The continuity between the more differentiated idealized self and its archaic forerunner means that rage like Caponsacchi's rises from a source too absolute for it to be satisfied by a limited revenge such as killing Guido or seeing him executed. Only an eternal

revenge--impossible in reality--could be adequate to his rage. Therefore the punishment he envisions for Guido must be perpetual, "not death!" (6.1903, 1905), but something worse.

Caponsacchi's need to try to wipe out his own experience of limitation also accounts for the stance he assumes in envisioning Guido's punishment. As Buckler remarks, the speech "assumes . . . the character of a Final Judgment" that should be "reserved to God" (159). But exactly because such a judgment is for God to make, Caponsacchi wants to make it; he wants to be God because doing that would prove he is unlimited and omnipotent after all.

The mode of damnation that Caponsacchi wants for Guido is not casting him down into hell fire; it is damnation in a Thomist mode that might well occur to a priest who has been studying the Summa. There Aquinas argues that since "God alone is Being by virtue of His own Essence," "the being of every creature depends on God," having its "being by participation" in His (Pt.1 Q.104 Art.1). The continued existence of creatures therefore depends on God's "continually pouring out existence into them" from His Being (Pt.1 Q.104 Art.3). Caponsacchi fantasizes a situation in which he and everyone else, acting in accordance with his will, withdraw existence from Guido by depriving him of participation in the being of the world, leaving him just enough being to suffer eternally in the company of Judas.

Caponsacchi imagines with delighted vindictiveness the process of Guido's deprivation: first he and the judges will "go away--leave Guido all alone / Back on the world again that knows him now!" (6.1908-09). Like the judges, "all honest forms of life" will share

Caponsacchi's attitude toward Guido, who will be "Pushed by the general horror and common hate / Low, lower" until he is "left o' the very ledge of things" trying to "catch convulsively" at some "foothold"; but all things will "disengage them[selves] from his clutch," saying, "'What, you are he, then, had Pompilia once / 'And so forwent her? Take not up with us!'" (6.1915-20). In spinning the scenario thus far, Caponsacchi both enjoys watching Guido suffer and, more importantly, creates a world which, as a narcissistic extension of himself, vindicates him by mirroring his view of Guido and Pompilia.

Guido's loss of being, having begun with his removal of the good Pompilia and the withdrawal from him of society's recognition, continues as he is "edged / Off all the table-land whence life upsprings / Aspiring to be immortality"; no longer endowed with the human opportunity to aspire and rise, what is left of Guido "slips, slides, slidders" like a "snake" down to "the horizontal line, creation's verge" that divides "what just is" from "absolute nothingness" (6.1921-31). There "in the loneliness" at the fringes of existence, Guido meets "Judas, made monstrous by much solitude" (6.1928, 1937). Clearly, Caponsacchi thinks of existence as something conferred or withdrawn by other people--a modification of Aquinas consistent with the narcissist's dependence on others' recognition for a sense of being. The priest assigns to Guido the annihilating isolation which he himself fears and from which he himself has just fled into a fantasy of a narcissistic, controlling union with all the world's others as his self-objects.

Caponsacchi's fantasy of the relationship between Judas and Guido is likewise colored by narcissistic preoccupations. He sees "The two . . . at one," merged in a mutually devouring relationship. Thinking of their mouths as the focal point of the merger, he imagines that "their love / . . . bites and claws like hate" and "their hate / . . . mops and mows" like "love" (6.1939-40). Though they "tear each [other] in devil's-fun, / Or fondle this the other while malice aches" (6.1941-42), the nastiness that he most elaborately fantasizes is oral:

> Kiss him the kiss, Iscariot! Pay that back,
> That smatch o' the slaver blistering on your lip,
> By the better trick, the insult he spared Christ--
> Lure him the lure o' the letters, Aretine!
> Lick him o'er slimy-smooth with jelly-filth
> O' the verse-and-prose pollution in love's guise!
> (6.1944-50)

Underlying the manifestly homosexual image of this relationship is a regressive narcissistic fantasy of the twinship (alter ego) relationship. Here, instead of providing Caponsacchi a pure and perfect mirror for himself (Pompilia in the fantasy of the two buried martyrs), such a relationship provides Guido a Judas-mirror and Judas a Guido-mirror, a reciprocity of reflections in which "Both teach, both learn detestability!" (6.1943).

Regression to an infantile phase of narcissistic mirroring and merger is likewise indicated by the focus on orality, conceived of here as spitting up and exchanging "pollution" (6.1949). Caponsacchi's fantasy of the withdrawal of Guido's being is thus in psychological terms a fantasy of the unravelling of Guido's individuation, a fantasy of the tearing down of his personal boundaries so that, in "the dark," he merges with Judas in a "spot out of the ken of God / Or care of man"

(6.1951, 1953-54). It is a fantasy in which the earliest union of the self with its self-object is a hell where two "Foes or friends . . . indissolubly bound" (6.1952) live an eternally primal life of love and hate confounded. The fantasy sounds like Guido, perhaps because--in his enraged frustration at the loss of his narcissistic union with Pompilia--Caponsacchi has gotten in touch with the same archaic feelings of narcissistic deprivation that fuel Guido's rage. Ironically enough, then, the fantasized punishment the priest has created to separate Guido from himself and cast him down forever has brought him to Guido's level.

This realization comes to Caponsacchi himself, and it is a blow to his idealized view of his own purity, righteousness, and efficacy. "Why, Sirs, what's this?" he exclaims; being "moved so much," he has spoken a side of his psyche so "sorry and strange" (6.1955, 1958) to him that he regards it not with "mock-amazement" (Slinn 121), but with real shock and astonishment to find "Futility, divagation" emerging, as he says, "from me / Bound to be rational, justify an act / Of sober man!" (6.1956-58). He fears his outburst may have hurt Pompilia's cause, since they may think she was crazy to choose him to help her (6.1959-61). It is far worse, however, that he has not fulfilled his conscious purpose of "justify[ing]" his own "act" in the "rational" way befitting a "sober man" like him: "My part was just to tell you how things stand, / State facts and not be flustered at their fume" (6.1967-68). Instead he has been "a poor rash advocate," has stepped out of the character he has tried to make himself into and has made a speech full of "slaver" and "jelly-filth" (6.1945, 1948) whose source

he hardly knows--"this from me"? (6.1956, italics added). The fantasy is thus a terrible blow to his pride.

Caponsacchi quickly mobilizes his defenses to deal with this self-inflicted wound. It is his "fate," he says--his "fate all through"--to be "ineffective help" (6.1962); thus he shifts his burdensome sense of responsibility toward some vast, impersonal, controlling force the operations of which he can but contemplate with resignation. Minimizing the outrageousness of the speech by understatement may help: it was a product of "undue zeal" (6.1965), yes; "But then 'tis a priest speaks," he reminds them (6.1969), clutching at an idealized role in which undue zeal, like an overscrupulous conscience, seems merely an excess of virtue. Most of all, he seems to need to defend himself against the notion--evidently his notion, though he imagines it to be the judges'--that his condemnation of Guido proves he "loved" Pompilia, when really, he says, "We had no thought / Of such infatuation, she and I . . ." (6.1970-73). Aware that the extravagance of his fantasy-punishment of Guido exposes the intense, nonrational core of his way of reacting to others, he needs to show that his relationship to Pompilia was not like that, to cover--and perhaps to still--his regressive capacity for infatuation by making a rational case about the matter. Also aware that his outburst has manifested a less-than-unsullied imagination, one capable of producing an extraordinarily perverse fantasy, he needs to recover and get confirmation of his sense of purity and exceptional spirituality.

To fulfill these needs and thus to comfort himself, Caponsacchi launches into a final round of self-justifying exhibitionism and

glorification of Pompilia, first imploring the judges to confirm his rationality and rightness about the "many points that prove" he was not infatuated with Pompilia: "do be just!" he pleads (6.1974). As evidence of his noninfatuation he refers to his care "to leave her free awhile" during the stop at the walled garden; but he is overwhelmed with regret at not having stayed with her for that "half-hour," since "She's dead now, Sirs!" (6.1975-82). Attempting to show, by being critical of her facial features, that he was mainly interested in "the purity that shone there," he involuntarily turns to glorifying "Her brow" that "seemed bent somewhat with an invisible crown / Of martyr and saint"; her eyes that "Looked out of such a sad sweet heaven on" him--a return to the theme of her gaze, so intimately connected with his narcissistic union with her; and the expression about her mouth that seemed "Careful for a whole world of sin and pain" (6.1989-96)--a return to his emotional identification of her with the Blessed Mother.

Caponsacchi's extraordinarily idealized view of Pompilia may not prove to anyone else that he was not infatuated--indeed, it may suggest that he was (see Hoerner 42-43)--but it reinforces his need to be her defender as well as his own. It heightens his impulse to prove their case against Guido and the judges, but to do so within the boundaries set by his self-idealization, especially his perfectionistic trends. Observing these limits helps him to defend himself against the unruly, archaic side of his narcissistic rage. Thus, asking the judges to "be rational" with him, he dissects Guido's claim that he wished to "vindicate his honour," expressing contempt for Guido's having put on "a clown's disguise" and having tried "to escape" like a "coward"

(6.1999-2002). In this argument the priest rebuilds his own sense of knightliness by condemning Guido in terms of the chivalric code. He bolsters his sense of intellectual superiority and legal correctness by analyzing "another point involving law": "the sentence" handed down by the judges, which "liars" have taken as "calumny against" him and Pompilia (6.2007-10).

It is evident that far from having gotten over his "compulsive legalism" (Boo 181), Caponsacchi is still trying to remake the outcome of the adultery trial through the force of his perfectionism, to make justice work to vindicate him and Pompilia--a project as strongly motivated as ever by his narcissistic anxiety about the way others view him. The court's decision gave him a "penalty" that was to be in force "Till further proof should follow of innocence"; but since the proceedings "Stopped there," there was no way to "get proof" (6.2011-16). He complains bitterly of having been left with "a name that sticks" simply because he was sentenced (6.2020-22). Caponsacchi also eagerly emphasizes that Pompilia asked two of Guido's family connections, Conti and Guillichini, to help her before, finally, she asked him (6.2023-28). The priest would like to have been her first choice, but he feels he scores another point here and, at the same time, establishes his superior responsiveness to Pompilia's need.

Caponsacchi's efforts to get justice from his audience have brought him to a point where the extent of the injustice surrounding the case and his comparative powerlessness to remedy it begin to overwhelm him. Mentioning Conti reminds him that this good friend, who would have "come here and told truth," has recently been "poisoned,"

evidently at Guido's behest (6.2036, 2032). Guillichini has been "condemned . . . / To the galleys, as a friend in this affair," railroaded by the Aretine governor "who refused Pompilia help / At first blush, being her husband's friend, you know" (6.2037-42). The governor has ruled in favor of Guido's claim that Pompilia and Caponsacchi have robbed him--"the charge [that] goes to the heart of the Governor," who would not be interested in "The spiritual sin, Rome looks to" (6.2049, 2046). Even if Caponsacchi could get vindication from the Roman court, Guido has gotten "Arezzo to receive" the view that Pompilia and the priest are common, money-grubbing thieves, "fit to brand and pillory and flog," and a momentary fantasy of reckoning with the governor breaks like a bubble against the further problem that the court and "Granduke" back home have in fact "authorize[d]" this sentence (6.2048-57).

The task of righting all these wrongs would be even more difficult than the task of gaining exoneration from the Roman court, for as Caponsacchi realizes, he would be up against much "worse men" (6.2052) than his present judges. Not only would the task be almost impossible at best; Caponsacchi would be terribly alone and isolated in attempting it. His friends Conti and Guillichini, the only people who would certainly have been sympathetic to him, are gone; and their fate is evidence that in Arezzo, good men do not win. Arezzo--the place where Caponsacchi's family pride, claims to entitlement, and emulative dreams of glory all have their roots--has been turned against him; there is no going home again for him, for there he would face humiliating punishment, surrounded by a jeering audience of those same people who

have venerated his great-uncle as a saint. The narcissistic wound that Guido suffered upon returning to Arezzo after the elopement is the wound Caponsacchi fears, and the fact that he really must fear it is in itself a serious threat to his idealized image. Caponsacchi's chances of obtaining resounding general confirmation of himself as hero-saint are practically nil in Arezzo.

Turning to "Rome, / Where better men are," he takes some comfort from the presence of Pompilia's deathbed confessor, who has published a statement placing her moral qualities above those of anyone else he has ever confessed (6.2058-63). This "good man" has done something Caponsacchi would like to have done by offering a public defense of Pompilia, and he asks--perhaps a bit enviously, perhaps a bit cynically--"Will you make him Pope one day?" (6.2064). Does goodness rise to power? The Pope has risen, and he is "good"; "But [he is] old,--else he would have his word to speak, / His truth to teach the world" about this case (6.2065-67). The Pope's goodness seems to have risen into a remote silence. Both the confessor and the Pope fall short of fulfilling Caponsacchi's ideal of goodness combined with the effectiveness and recognition accorded to power; neither offers him an idealized self-object to replace Pompilia, neither demonstrates that his ideal is attainable, and neither has confirmed his idealized self.

When Caponsacchi says "I thirst for truth, / But shall not drink it till I reach the source" (6.2067-68), he seems to be giving up on getting a true judgment in this world--that is, a judgment confirming his version of himself, his version of Pompilia, and his version of the

rescue. The world is not going to give him what he needs; his solution is not going to work.

IV

The pain of giving up his search for glory moves Caponsacchi to attempt once more to detach himself from this life, in which there remains no possibility for satisfaction of his needs. "Sirs, I am quiet again," he tells the judges; "You see, we are / So very pitiable, she and I, / Who had conceivably been otherwise" (6.2069-71). From one point of view, of course, Caponsacchi is not very "pitiable" compared to Pompilia, who has suffered far more and who must soon die; but for him, losing his sense of being his idealized self is a psychic torture from which he must move away. He must try to repress his disturbing and fruitless narcissistic rage: "Forget distemperature and idle heat! / Apart from truth's sake, what's to move so much?" (6.2072-73).

In order to accomplish this detachment, he first tries to change his way of thinking about his past project. "Pompilia will be presently with God" (6.2074), and there is no better place to be. "I am, on earth, as good as out of it, / A relegated priest; when exile ends, / I mean to do my duty and live long" (6.2075-77), he says. He himself exists now solely as a man entirely separated from Pompilia. He only exists as a dutiful priest who helps others: "She and I are mere strangers now: but priests / Should study passion; how else cure mankind, / Who come for help in passionate extremes" (6.2078-80). He and Pompilia are not "mere strangers" (6.2078), and he did not attempt to rescue her to "study passion" (6.2079) as though he were doing field work. In "fac[ing] life as a joyless prospect that only the austerest

stoicism can make endurable" (Buckler 135), Caponsacchi is creating a new fiction of himself and his past--a new idealized image in which, free of involvement or passion, he has done one duty--to "study passion"--to prepare for his other duty--to "cure mankind" (6.2079).

This new version of his project preserves his narcissistic sense of saviorhood by freezing it in a block of ice. It simply removes the question of whether his feelings for Pompilia were allowable by denying that he had any. It makes him invulnerable to others' opinions by making his mission a one-way relationship to "mankind": he will help them in their "passionate extremes" but will know too much for them to reach him, except perhaps with their humble gratitude (6.2079-80).

As always, the possibility of transcendent isolation, without the confirming presence of others, threatens Caponsacchi; but this time, rather than swinging back toward a performative engagement with the world, he substitutes the fantasy of

> an imagined life
> Of who, unfettered by a vow, unblessed
> By the higher call,--since you will have it so,--
> Leads it companioned by the woman there. (6.2081-84)

It is, first, a fantasy of freedom from "a vow" (6.2082) that binds the priest to something society considers a "higher call" (6.2083). Not primarily a fantasy of sexual freedom, it is a fantasy of being released from the inner dictates that drive him to seek a glory in accord with his idealized image of himself as heroic-saintly priest, a fantasy of being free from the need to have the world validate him as this ideal figure, and a fantasy of being free to seek a way out of his isolation and into a "companioned" life (6.2084).

Caponsacchi's "Utopian vision" (Hair 150) is thus a fantasy of detachment from the relatively individuated narcissism reflected in his search for public acclaim; at the same time, however, as a fantasy of a life with Pompilia, it reflects the relatively regressive potential for narcissistic union which, all along, has been at the center of her holiness for him. "Out of the low obscure and petty world" (6.2086) and embedded in one another's presence, they would have an exclusive relationship of mutual mirroring and idealization--a relationship of narcissistic bliss and psychological safety. Insofar as the parties to this regressive relationship took notice of "the world" at all, they would see it selectively, would "see one purpose and one will / Evolve themselves i' the world, change wrong to right . . ." (6.2087-88). This life in blinders would allow the priest to inhabit a world in which justice and goodness and righteousness need not be pursued; in which effort is unnecessary, since God as Primary Caregiver supplies everything; and in which Caponsacchi would not need to risk the exposure of his self-idealization to the world's unevolved audiences, since he would have Pompilia's confirmation.

Under the conditions of this "dream of ultimates," this final version of the fantasy of the twin martyrs (Wilt 356), he would "have to do with nothing but the true, / The good, the eternal" (6.2089-90), thus avoiding the taint of ordinariness, the wear and tear of the real upon his idealized self, which would be preserved unstained. "In the main current of the general life" and even more in "small experiences of every day, / Concerns of the particular hearth and home," he would find these ideals, "learn[ing] not only by a comet's rush / But a

rose's birth,--not by the grandeur, God-- / But the comfort, Christ" (6.2091-96). This safe, cozy child's world of blooming flowers (reminiscent, of course, of the walled garden where Pompilia held the borrowed baby) and of a warm, immanent deity presents the image of the embedded life, in which there seems to be no tension (not even overstimulation), no gap between what is available and what is desired, what is and what should be. It reflects, too, a fantasy of being able to be satisfied with smaller, unspectacular aspects of experience that are always available. In such an adjustment of expectations, "the general retraction of all wishes, so characteristic of the process of resignation, begins" (NHG 276).

Yet this fantasy, too, must be relinquished: "All this, how far away!" Caponsacchi admits; it is "Mere delectation, meet for a minute's dream!" (6.2096-97). He compares himself to "a drudging student" who "Opens his Plutarch, puts him in the place / Of Roman, Grecian; draws the patched gown close, / Dreams, 'Thus should I fight, save or rule the world!'" (6.2098-2101). The comparison suggests significant though indirect insight into the sources of an idealized self such as his. The student's favorite tales of the noble Greeks and Romans--like the history of his warrior ancestors, the story of his saintly great-uncle, and the legend of Saint George and the dragon, which combines chivalry and sanctity in an image Caponsacchi once appropriated as his own--lend him dreams of glory in which, for a time, he is the warrior, the savior, the ruler whose "drudging" work in a "patched gown" (like Caponsacchi's nominal priesthood in Arezzo) is a mere prelude to the revelatory achievement which is his true destiny. Through the simile

of the student Caponsacchi seems to be groping toward an understanding of how his vicarious experience of the past and his imaginative identification with the larger-than-life figures of his dreams have contributed to his own development.

He believes, however, or is trying to convince himself, that dreams of glory and narcissistic bliss like his--dreams that fuel and shape his psychic life--are dreams from which he can simply wake up as does the student, who "smilingly, contentedly , awakes / To the old solitary nothingness. / So I, from such communion, pass content . . ." (6.2102-04). Here Caponsacchi is attempting to create a stance that will allow him to do two things: to preserve his "imagined life" with Pompilia, which automatically manifests his ideals and completely fulfills his needs through the mutual saviorship of a flawless narcissistic union ("communion" [6.2104]); and to live henceforth the detached life of priestly duty, life in "the old solitary nothingness" (6.2103), which he sees as his actual prospect.

To hold these contrary lives in suspension within himself would be a triumph of the new resigned solution Caponsacchi has been attempting to construct. His "last cry," like Guido's (cf. Nelson 97n), signals that his attempted re-solution has failed: "O great, just, good God! Miserable me!" (6.2105). He cannot "resign himself . . . to the tragic outcome" (Gridley, "Browning's Caponsacchi" 295) of his rescue attempt; more importantly, however, he cannot resign himself to what Buckler calls "the situation of all failed idealists" (138), to what Horney would describe as the "painful discrepancy" a narcissist finds when he "measur[es]" his actual life "by the yardstick of infinitude, of the

attainment of fantastic happiness . . ." (NHG 196). Caponsacchi's final opposition of his "miserable" state (6.2105) and the perfection of God expresses this gap between his reality and his insatiable aspiration to Godhead. At the end "Caponsacchi finally stands alone with his desire" (Slinn 122); and they are far apart.

The psychodynamic vicissitudes that have brought Caponsacchi to this pass are intensified, extreme variations of those we have noted in his development up to the fictive present of the monologue. Under the psychic onslaught of Guido's crime, the priest's already beleaguered self-idealization as heroic rescuer-saint has been shaken to its archaic foundations, and self-hate threatens to destroy his defense system. In the course of his speech, he attempts to reinterpret the past so as to make it yield up a revised self-idealization with which he can identify and for which he can get the audience response that the narcissist depends upon to confirm this identification. However, because the members of his audience are the judges whose previous decision left him frustrated and angry and because they are now easily available targets for his externalized self-hate, his rage at them undermines his efforts to win their confirmation. Caponsacchi therefore swings between strong impulses to excoriate them as Guido's dupes and accessories, while he looks down upon and judges them, and strong impulses to appease them and enlist their supportive confirmation. At each extreme, he is further threatened by breakthroughs of regressive narcissistic forces that have been aroused by his psychic trauma: archaic grandiosity that fuels his angry, audience-alienating, self-inflating impulses; and archaic idealizing

energies that, combined with his self-effacing trends, impel him to appease the judges and increase his longing for merger with Pompilia.

As Caponsacchi cycles through extreme positions within this narcissistic bind, he tries to build, identify with, and be confirmed as some idealized self that would balance or contain the forces that are tearing him apart. Variations of a teacher/prophet/martyr self-idealization temporarily accommodate these forces, especially when he feels he is drawing the judges into his narcissistic field, either by involving them in an idealizing alliance, with Pompilia as its shared object of worship and Caponsacchi as its chief priest and prophet, or by enlisting them in a grandiose alliance, with Guido as its shared object of condemnation and Caponsacchi as its wrathful God. The priest's rage repeatedly disrupts these self-idealizations and alliances, however; and periodically he tries to deal with this instability by suppressing his anger and cultivating an alternative solution, resignation. Its variations are expressed in the images of the monk-chronicler, the student with the bepatched gown and inspiring books, and finally the detached healer-priest supported in his solitude by a fantasy life of merger with Pompilia. As we have just seen, he fails in this last attempt to integrate his dreams of expansive greatness and adulation with his idealizing and self-effacing needs and to place his regressive impulses under the control of his more mature psychic structures.

The customary view of the outcome is of course quite different from the reading I have offered. It is generally recognized that <u>The Ring and the Book</u> reflects "an idealized reading of life" (DeVane 346)

and that its characters reflect "ideal heroisms and villainies" (Siegchrist 8), as in the case of the "religio-heroic characterization of . . . Caponsacchi" in terms of "saintly valor" (Phipps 266). Interpretation of Caponsacchi's psychological state at the end of his monologue tends to adopt the same "religio-heroic" tone. By the end Caponsacchi has been "recalled to his priestly vows and the true meaning of Christianity" (Langbaum 112); "his love" has been "consummated in ultimate self-sacrifice" (Phipps 250); he has undergone a "fiery baptism" that has purged him at the price of the destruction of all his "prospects for happiness" (Buckler 50); he has achieved "an understanding which is redemptive" (Slinn 122); his last "paradoxical" outcry expresses his saving insight into "the distance . . . and the connection between the solitary nothingness one is and the shared dream one has of full participation in being" (Wilt 356).

I see little justification, from a psychological point of view, for the general view that Caponsacchi's is the cry of a redeemed man. What many have taken to be his conversion or his growth has consisted of his temporary success in acting and casting his experience in the mold of his idealized self; it is progress in imagining himself into an imagined image. At the end as at the beginning of the events of the story, he is still seeking a regressive state of merger that he sees as the height of human experience. At the end as at the beginning of his monologue, he is still searching for a fiction of himself and his life to compensate for his actual failure, and his last line is a cry of pain at the failure of fiction. Without the aspirations and projects associated with his idealized self, yet alienated as much as ever from

his real self, he finds himself empty, a man of nothingness for whom all being resides in an inaccessible other that he calls God. In a way he has burned himself out for Pompilia, as he wished to do; but his is the sacrifice of an idealized self that never actually existed, the martyrdom of ineffectual claims and deeply wounded pride.

V

As our analysis of Caponsacchi's monologue suggests, theories of narcissism not only offer a way to categorize and synthesize traits and modes of experience conspicuous in a large proportion of Browning's monologuists, but also provide a means to interpret, in detail, the unfolding of a particular mimetic portrait. Caponsacchi's account of his life--his family background, his attitudes toward his vocation, his response to Pompilia and to her plea for help, his handling of the flight, and his reaction to his trial and relegation to Civita--emerges as a complex but fundamentally consistent whole, intelligible as a brilliantly insightful case history of a narcissist's development. What may be inferred from the speech about the speaker's evolved character structure and major psychological needs and vulnerabilities, together with what we know of the psychodynamic patterns established in the course of his development, helps us to understand his response to Guido's murder of Pompilia as his response to the narcissistic wound inflicted upon him by this event. The representation of the speaker's psychodynamic processes as he responds allows us in turn to interpret the structure and shifting rhetorics of the monologue as formal manifestations of the defensive moves and countermoves generated by his imperiled narcissistic solution.

The same approach to interpretation shows similar explanatory power when applied to a substantial majority of Browning's dramatic monologues, including nearly all of those for which he is best known. From "Pauline" (1833) to "Cristina and Monaldeschi" (1883) and "'Imperante Augusto Natus Est--'" (1889), narcissistic self-idealizations, aspirations, fantasies, defenses, and views of others and the world are central, unifying modes of experience. Over and over, too, Browning reworks the problem of dealing with wounds to narcissism, representing myriad variations of the turmoil attendant upon such psychic trauma. Very frequently, the poet portrays the monologuists' major response to this problem as a relentless search for self-objects to restore a shaken sense of perfection and to confirm a threatened self-idealization. They vary considerably in the degree to which their archaic narcissistic energies and more mature narcissistic ambitions have been placed in the service of constructive ends; otherwise Fra Lippo Lippi might be an Unknown Painter or an Andrea. The circumstances of some allow them a more tranquil, unchallenged identification with the idealized self than others enjoy; otherwise the Duke might be a Guido. Nonetheless, the narcissistic core of so many Browning speakers and the narcissistic entelechy of his version of the dramatic monologue as a genre suggest that there is something to be said for the often repeated observation that in some way, all of Browning's characters are the same character.

With the help of our empathic involvement with the poet's speakers combined with our analysis and interpretation of our observations in terms of appropriate psychological concepts, we may define and specify

that sameness--that convergence of experience--without thereby lessening our appreciation of the diversity of Browning's achievement in these poems, the freshness and abundance of his insights into the psychic phenomena that he took as his special province. On the contrary, to understand the essentially psychological nature of this achievement, in terms meaningful in an age that turns a skeptical eye upon messages such as his have been taken to be, is to see Browning new in the light of theories that are beginning to be able to explain what he was able to create. In reading the dramatic monologues as some of the most psychologically insightful works of the Victorian period, Browning's capability as a mimetic artist, whose portrayal of the vicissitudes of narcissism is unparalleled, emerges as the heart of his genius.

APPENDIX
BROWNING'S "PICTOR IGNOTUS" (1845)

FLORENCE, 15--

I could have painted pictures like that youth's
Ye praise so. How my soul springs up! No bar
Stayed me--ah, thought which saddens while it soothes!
Never did fate forbid me, star by star,
To outburst on your night with all my gift 5
Of fires from God: nor would this flesh have shrunk
From seconding that soul, with eyes uplift
And wide to Heaven, or, straight like thunder, sunk
To the centre of an instant, or around
Sent calmly and inquisitive to scan 10
The license and the limit, space and bound,
Allowed to Truth made visible in Man.
And, like that youth ye praise so, all I saw,
Over the canvass could my hand have flung,
Each face obedient to its passion's law, 15
Each passion clear proclaimed without a tongue;
Whether Hope rose at once in all the blood,
A-tiptoe for the blessing of embrace,
Or Rapture drooped the eyes as when her brood
Pull down the nesting dove's heart to its place, 20
Or Confidence lit swift the forehead up,
And locked the mouth fast, like a castle braved,--
Men, women, children, hath it spilt, my cup?
What did ye give me that I have not saved?
Nor will I say I have not dreamed (how well!) 25
Of going--I, in each new picture,--forth,
And making new hearts beat and bosoms swell,
As still to Pope and Kaiser, East, West, South and North,
Bound for the calmly satisfied great State,
Or glad aspiring little burgh, it went, 30
Flowers cast upon the car which bore the freight
Through old streets named afresh from its event,
--Of reaching thus my home, where Age should greet
My face, and Youth the star as yet distinct
Above his hair, lie learning at my feet,-- 35
Oh, thus to live, I and my pictures, linked
With love about, and praise, till life should end,

And then not go to Heaven but linger here,
Here on my earth, its every man my friend,--
Oh, that grows frightful 'tis so wildly dear! 40
But a voice changed it! Glimpses of such sights
Have scared me, like the revels thro' a door
Of some strange House of Idols at its rites;
This world seemed not the world it was before!
Mixed with my loving ones, there trooped--for what? 45
Who summoned these cold faces which begun
To press on me and judge me? As asquat
And shrinking from the soldiery a nun,
They drew me forth, and spite of me . . enough!
These buy and sell our pictures, take and give, 50
Count them for garniture and household-stuff,
And where they live our pictures needs must live,
And see their faces, listen to their prate,
Partakers of their daily pettiness,
Discussed of,--"This I love or this I hate, 55
This likes me more and this affects me less!"
Wherefore I chose my portion. If at whiles
My heart sinks as monotonous I paint
These endless cloisters and eternal aisles
With the same series, Virgin, Babe, and Saint, 60
With the same cold, calm, beautiful regard,
At least no merchant traffics in my heart;
The sanctuary's gloom at least shall ward
Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart;
Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine 65
While, blackening in the daily candle smoke,
They moulder on the damp wall's travertine,
'Mid echoes the light footstep never woke.
So die, my pictures; surely, gently die!
Oh youth men praise so, holds their praise its worth? 70
Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry?
Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth?

Text reconstructed from Browning, "Pictor Ignotus," 1845 variants.

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I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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